



THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION
DEVOTED TO BORDER HISTORY

Issued Weekly By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 69.

Price, Five Cents.

BUFFALO BILL'S SPY SHADOWER

OR
THE HERMIT OF GRAND CANYON



BY
THE AUTHOR OF
BUFFALO BILL

ON ONE OCCASION IN AN INDIAN FIGHT WALLACE WESTON HAD SAVED THE LIFE OF THE GREAT SCOUT, BUFFALO BILL.



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No. 69.

NEW YORK, September 6, 1902.

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BUFFALO BILL'S SPY SHADOWER;

OR,

The Hermit of Grand Canyon.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

CHAPTER I.

THE HERMIT OF THE GRAND CANYON.

A horseman drew rein one morning, upon the brink of what is one of the wonders of the world, yet seen by very few—the Grand Canyon of the Colorado.

A mighty abyss, too vast for the eye to take in in its grand immensity; a mighty mountain rent asunder and forming a chasm which is a valley of grandeur and beauty, through which flows the Colorado Grande, and with ranges of mountains towering to cloudland on all sides; cliffs of scarlet, blue, violet, yes, all hues of the rainbow; crystal streams flowing merrily along; verdant meadows, vales and hills, with massive forests everywhere—such was the sight that met the admiring gaze of the horseman as he sat there in his saddle, his horse looking down into the canyon.

It was a spot avoided by Indians as the abiding-place of evil spirits; a scene shunned by white men; a mighty retreat where a fugitive, it would seem, would be forever safe, no matter what the crime that had driven him to seek a refuge there.

Adown from where the horseman had halted, was

the bare trace of a trail, winding around the edge of an overhanging rock by a shelf that was not a yard in width and which only a man could tread whose head was cool and heart fearless.

Wrapt in admiration at the scene, the mist-clouds floating lazily upward from the canyon, the silver ribbon far away that revealed the winding river, and the songs of birds coming from a hundred leafy retreats on the hillsides, the horseman gave a deep sigh, as though memories most sad were awakened in his breast by the scene, and then, dismounting, began to unwrap a lariat from his saddle-horn.

He was dressed as a miner, wore a slouch hat, was of commanding presence, and his darkly-bronzed face, heavily bearded, was full of determination, intelligence and expression.

Two led horses, carrying heavy packs, were behind the animal he rode, and attaching the lariats to their bits he took one end and led the way down the most perilous and picturesque trail along the shelf running around the jutting point of rocks.

When he drew near the narrowest point, he took off

the saddle and packs, and one at a time led the horses downward and around the hazardous rocks.

A false step, a movement of fright in one of the animals, would send him downward to the depths more than a mile below.

But the trembling animals seemed to have perfect confidence in their master, and after a long while he got them by the point of greatest peril.

Going back and forward he carried the packs and saddles, and replacing them upon the animals began once more the descent of the only trail leading down into the Grand Canyon, from that side.

The way was rugged, most dangerous in places, and several times his horses barely escaped a fall over the precipice, the coolness, and strong arm of the man alone saving them from death, and his stores from destruction.

It was nearly sunset when he at last reached the bottom of the stupendous rift, and only the tops of the cliffs were tinged with the golden light, the valley being in densest shadow.

Going on along the canyon at a brisk pace, as though anxious to reach some camping-place before nightfall, after a ride of several miles, he came in sight of a wooded canyon, entering the one he was then in, and with heights towering toward heaven so far that all below seemed as black as night.

But a stream wound out of the canyon, to mingle its clear waters with the grand Colorado River a mile away, and massive trees grew near at hand, sheltering a cabin that stood upon the sloping hill at the base of a cliff that arose thousands of feet above it.

When within a few hundred yards of the lone cabin, suddenly there was a crashing, grinding sound, a terrific roar, a rumbling, and the earth seemed shaken violently as the whole face of the mighty cliff came crushing down into the valley, sending up showers of splintered rocks and clouds of dust that were blinding and appalling.

Back from the scene of danger fled the frightened horses, the rider showing no desire to check their flight until a spot of safety was reached.

Then, half a mile from the fallen cliff he paused, his face white, his whole form quivering, while his horses stood trembling with terror.

"My God! the cliff has fallen upon my home, and my unfortunate comrade lies buried beneath a mountain of rocks.

"We mined too far beneath the cliff, thus causing a cave-in.

"A few minutes more and I would also have been buried, shared poor Langley's fate; but a strange destiny it is that protects me from death—a strange one indeed!

"He is gone, and I alone am now the Hermit of the Grand Canyon, a Croesus in wealth of gold, yet a fugitive from my fellowmen.

"What a fate is mine, and how will it all end, I wonder?"

An hour passed before the unnerved man felt able to seek a camp for the night, so great had been the shock upon him of the falling cliff, and the fate he had felt had overtaken his comrade.

At last he rode on up the canyon once more, determined to seek a spot he knew well where he could camp, a couple of miles above his destroyed home.

He passed the pile of rocks, heaped far up the cliff from which they had fallen, looking upon them as the sepulcher of his companion.

"Poor Lucas Langley!

"He too had his sorrows, his secrets, which drove him, like me, to seek a retreat far from mankind, and become a hunted man.

"Alas! what has the future in store for me?"

With a sigh he rode on up the valley, his way now guided by the moonlight alone, and at last turned into another canyon, for the Grand Canyon has hundreds of others branching off from it, and some of them penetrating for miles back into the mountains.

He had gone up this canyon for a few hundred yards, and was just about to halt, and go into camp upon the banks of a small stream, when his eyes caught sight of a light ahead.

"Ah! what does that mean!" he ejaculated in surprise.

Hardly had he spoken when from up the canyon came the deep voice of a dog barking, his scent telling him of a human presence near.

"Ah! Savage is not dead then, and after all, what I had no hope of whatever, Lucas Langley may have escaped death," and the horseman rode quickly on toward the light.

The barking of the dog continued, but it was not a note of warning but of welcome, and as the horseman drew rein by a campfire a huge brute sprang up and greeted him with every manifestation of delight, while a man came forward from the shadows of the trees and cried:

"Thank Heaven you are back again, Pard Seldon, for I had begun to fear for your safety."

"And I was sure that I would never meet you again in life, Lucas, for I believed you at the bottom of that mountain of rocks that fell from the cliff and crushed out our little home," and the hands of the two men met in a warm grasp.

"It would have been so, but for a warning I had when working in the mine. I saw that the cliff was splitting and settling, and running out I discovered that it must fall, and before very long. I at once got the two mules out of the canyon above, packed all our traps upon them, and hastened away to a spot of safety. Then I returned and got all else I could find gathered up our gold, and came here and made out camp. To-night the cliff fell, but not expecting you to arrive by night, I was to be on the watch for you

in the morning; but thank Heaven you are safe and home again."

"And I am happy to find you safe, Lucas. I was within an eighth of a mile of the cliff when it fell, and I shall never forget the sight, the sound, the appalling dread for a few moments, as I fled to a spot of safety, my horses bearing me along like the wind in their mad terror."

"It was appalling, and I have not dared leave my camp since, far as I am from it, for it resounded through the canyons like a mighty battle with heavy guns. But, come, comrade, and we will have supper and talk over all that has happened."

The horses were staked out up the canyon, where grass and water were plentiful, and then the two men sat down to supper, though neither seemed to have much of an appetite after what had occurred.

But Savage, the huge, vicious-looking dog, felt no bad results from his fright of a few hours before, and ate heartily.

When their pipes were lighted the man who had lately arrived said:

"Well, Lucas, I brought back provisions and other things to last us a year, and I care not to go again from this canyon until I carry a fortune in gold with me."

"Yes, here we are safe, and I feel that something has happened to cause you to say what you do, pard."

"And I will tell you what it is," impressively returned the one who had spoken of himself as the Hermit of the Grand Canyon.

"Yes," he added, slowly. "I will tell you a secret, comrade."

"Pard, after what has happened, the falling of the cliff, and our narrow escape from death, I feel little like sleep, tired as I am, so, as I said, I will tell you a secret," continued Andrew Seldon, speaking in a way that showed his thoughts were roaming in the past.

"You will have a good listener, pard," was the answer.

"Yes, I feel that I will, and you having told me that you were a fugitive from the law, that your life had its curse upon it, I will tell you of mine, at least enough of it to prove to you that I also dare not show my face among my fellow-men."

"You know me as Andrew Seldon, and I have with me proof that I could show to convince one that such is my name; but, in reality, Andrew Seldon is dead, and I am simply playing his part in life, for I am not unlike him in appearance, and, as I said, I have the proofs that enable me to impersonate him."

"My real name is Wallace Weston, whom circumstances beyond my control made a murderer and fugitive, and here I am."

"I entered the army as a private cavalry soldier, and worked my way up to sergeant, with the hope of getting a commission some day. But one day another

regiment came to the frontier post where I was stationed, and a member of it was the man with whom I had previously quarreled. Well, the recognition was mutual, a quarrel followed, and he—his name was Manton Mayhew—fell by my hand, and he, too, was a sergeant."

"I said nothing in my defense, and accepted my fate. On one occasion, in an Indian fight, I had saved the life of the scout Buffalo Bill——"

"Ah, yes, I know of him," said the listener, earnestly.

"He, in return, rode through the Indian country, to the quarters of the district commander, to try and get a reprieve, hoping to glean new evidence to clear me. He was refused, and returned just as I was led down on the banks of the river for execution. I heard the result and determined in a second, to escape, or be killed in the attempt. Buffalo Bill's horse stood near, and with a bound I was upon his back, rushed him into the stream, swam across and escaped. I was fired upon by the scout, under an order to do so, but his bullets were not aimed to kill me. Night was near at hand, and pursuit was begun, but I had a good start, reached the desert and entered it."

"The next day—for the scout's horse was worn down—my pursuers would have overtaken me had I not suddenly come upon a stray horse in a clump of timber, an oasis in the desert. I mounted him and pushed straight on into the desert, and the next day came upon a solitary rock, by which lay the dead body of a man upon which the coyotes had just begun to feed."

"He had starved to death in the desert, and the horse I had found was his."

"At once an idea seized me to let my pursuer believe that I was that dead man; so I dressed him in my uniform, killed the horse near him, left the scout's saddle and bridle there, and started off on foot over the desert, attired as the man whom I had found there."

"With him I had found letters, papers, and a map and diary, and these gave me his name, and more, for I found that the map would lead me to a gold-mine, the one in this canyon in which we have worked so well to our profit."

"I wandered back, off the desert, and you know the rest; how I came to the camp where you lay wounded and threatened with death by your comrade, Black Heart Bill, who knew that you had a mine which he was determined to have. In Black Heart Bill I recognized a brother of Sergeant Manton Mayhew, another man whom I sought revenge upon."

"You remember my duel with Hugh Mayhew, and that he fell by my hand? Taking the name of Andrew Seldon, and leaving all to believe that I, Wallace Weston, died in the desert, I came here, with you as my companion."

"We are growing rich, and though the Cliff Mine

has fallen in, there are others that will pan out even better.

"But, pard, when I went to the post this time for provisions, I came upon Buffalo Bill escorting a deserter to Fort Faraway, and a band of desperadoes from the mines of Last Chance had ambushed him to rescue the prisoner.

"I went to the rescue of the scout, saved him and his prisoner, and went on my way to the post; but yet I half believe, in spite of believing me dead, and my changed appearance with my long hair and beard, that Buffalo Bill half recognized me.

"I must take no more chances, so shall remain close in this canyon until ready to leave it and go far away with my fortune, to enjoy it elsewhere.

"Again, pard: I had written to the home of Andrew Seldon, whom I am now impersonating, and I find that he, too, was a fugitive from the law, and that there is no reason for me to share this fortune with any one there, as I had intended to do; so now let us be lost to the world, hermits here in this weird land of mystery, the Grand Canyon, where no one dares come, until we are ready to seek new associations and homes elsewhere, and enjoy our riches."

"Pard, I thank you for your confidence, your secret. I felt that you had been a sufferer in the past, while I am sure you were not the one to do the first wrong. In all things I will be guided by you," said Lucas Langley, warmly, and it being late the two men retired to their blankets to sleep.

CHAPTER II.

THE GRAVE AT THE DESERTED CAMP.

Two men had met in the remote wilds of the Grand Canyon country, as the district bordering upon the Colorado River was called, having appointed a mysterious, deserted camp as a rendezvous.

One of these men needs no description from my pen, hardly more than a passing introduction to say that he bore the name of Buffalo Bill.

He had come alone from Fort Faraway, to the deserted camp over a hundred miles from the nearest habitation, to meet a new-found friend, one known in Last Chance Claim as "Doctor Dick," and a man of mystery.

The latter was, in person, almost as striking in appearance as was handsome, dashing Bill Cody, for he was tall, sinewy in build, graceful, and dressed in a way to attract attention, with his cavalry boots, gold spurs, corduroy pants, velvet jacket, silk shirt and broad black sombrero encircled by a chain of gold links.

Doctor Dick, too, was not afraid either to make a lavish display of jewels, his weapons were gold-mounted, as was also his saddle and bridle, and from the fact that he was an ardent and successful gambler,

and was supposed to be very rich, he was called in Last Chance "The Gold King."

Doctor Dick had made his *début* into Last Chance mining-camp, by bringing in the coach, one day, with the dead body of the driver on the box by his side, and two murdered passengers on the inside.

He had run off, single-handed, the road-agents who had held up the coach, and therefore became a hero at once, adding to his fame very quickly by showing that he could "shoot to kill" when attacked.

Signifying his intention of practicing medicine and surgery in Last Chance, and gambling in his leisure moments, Doctor Dick had established himself in a pleasant cabin near the hotel, to at once become popular, and began to make money.

When Buffalo Bill went to Last Chance on a special Secret Service mission, to investigate the holding up of the coach, and had recognized there a deserter, whom he had orders to take "dead or alive," Doctor Dick had helped him out of what appeared to be a very ugly scrape, and thus the two men had become friends.

Becoming confidential, Doctor Dick had told the scout a few chapters of his life, and he alone doubted that his foe from boyhood, Sergeant Wallace Weston—who had been reported as dying in the desert while seeking to escape—was dead, and the two, the scout and the gambler doctor, had arranged to meet at the deserted camp and discover if the real truth could not be ascertained.

So it was at the deserted camp they had met, and Doctor Dick had stood with uncovered head before a quaking aspen tree, at the foot of which was a grave.

Upon the tree had been cut a name and date, and this told that there lay the form of Hugh Mayhew, killed in a duel by one whom he had wronged.

It further told that Hugh Mayhew was known in the mines as a desperado, whose cruel deeds had gained for him the sobriquet of Black Heart Bill.

Convinced that the body in the grave was that of Hugh Mayhew, after he had unearthed the remains, and recognizing in that decaying form his own brother—one of the triplets born to his mother—Doctor Dick had seemed deeply moved when he told that he was the last of the trio and lived to avenge them; that he was sure Wallace Weston, their old foe, was their slayer, for he knew from the scout that he had killed his brother Manton at the fort, and hence he would not be convinced that the grave in the desert of Arizona held the body of Weston until he had certain proof of it.

"That man who came to your rescue, who called himself the Hermit of the Grand Canyon, who sought to shun you after his service to you, is either Wallace Weston, or knows something of him, and it is his trail we must pick up on his return to his retreat, and follow to the end, before I am satisfied," Doctor Dick had said to Buffalo Bill.

And so it was that the two had met at the deserted camp to pick up the trail of the Hermit and follow it to the end, bring what it might to Doctor Dick.

The trail of the Hermit of the Grand Canyon—who had told the secret to his companion that he was impersonating another man, one whom he knew to be dead, to whom he owed the discovery of the gold mine then making him rich—was taken up by Buffalo Bill, and his comrade, Doctor Dick, and followed to the brink of the grandest view in all Nature's marvels, the Grand Canyon of the Colorado.

To a less experienced scout than Buffalo Bill, there would have appeared to be no trail down into the depths of that mighty chasm, and it would have been thought that the one whom they trailed had retraced his steps from there.

But the scout was not one to be thrown off the trail by any obstacle that perseverance, pluck and hard work could overcome, and so he set about finding a way down into the canyon, though there was no trace of a traveled path left on the solid rocks upon which he stood.

Doctor Dick's determined assertion that he did not believe his old enemy, Wallace Weston, to be dead, really impressed the scout.

The scout had been anxious to go alone with the gambler doctor, in the search, for he did have the hope that, if really found, Wallace Weston might be reconciled with Doctor Dick, while, if taken by troopers, he would be returned to the fort and executed, as he was under death sentence.

Buffalo Bill never forgot a service rendered him, and he did not wish to see the sergeant put to death, where he was already believed to be dead, and the secret might be kept.

After a long search Buffalo Bill found the perilous path down which the one he followed had gone with his packhorses.

He revealed the fact to Doctor Dick, and the two, after a long consultation, decided to take the risk and make the descent into the Grand Valley.

For men with less nerve than these two possessed it would have been impossible; and, as it was, there were times when the winding trail and dangers put their pluck to the test.

At last the valley was reached, and, greatly relieved, the two went into camp before prosecuting their search further.

The Hermit had admitted to Buffalo Bill, whom they had lately met upon the trail, that he had a comrade dwelling with him in his retreat, wherever that retreat was.

Would it be that they held a secret there they did not wish known, and so would resist the intrusion of others?

It might be, and that a death struggle would follow the discovery of their retreat.

Still, Buffalo Bill was not one to dread whatever

might turn up, and he had seen Doctor Dick tried and proven true as steel and brave as a lion.

And so the search continued, the scout unerringly clinging to the trail until, just as the two felt that the retreat of those mysterious dwellers in the Grand Canyon was almost before them, they came upon a sight that caused them to draw rein and sit upon their horses appalled at the scene presented to their view.

What they saw was the fallen cliff, and there, just peering out from among the piles of rocks, was the shattered end of a stout cabin.

They had found the secret retreat, but they stood there feeling that those who had dwelt in that ruined cabin were beyond the sight of human eyes, buried beneath a monument of rocks an army could not remove in weeks.

"And this is the end?" said Buffalo Bill, the first to speak, breaking a silence that was appalling.

"Yes, his end, for he undoubtedly lies buried there beneath that mass of rock.

"If it is my foe, Wallace Weston, who met such a fate, so let it be."

The two did not tarry long in the canyon, for a dread of the weird spot seemed to have come over them.

Doctor Dick roamed about, picking up bits of rock and examining it closely, while he muttered:

"It was a gold mine that held them here, but that falling cliff has hidden the secret forever."

And Buffalo Bill went about searching for trails, yet made no comment, whether he found any or not, to indicate that the lone dwellers in the canyon had not both perished in their cabin, and lay buried beneath the hills of rock that had fallen from the heights above the valley.

But, as the two men rode away up the dangerous mountain-trail, there were eyes peering upon them they had little dreamed, and Wallace Weston muttered:

"They believe me dead now; so let it be."

CHAPTER III.

MASKED AND MERCILESS.

Dave Dockery, the driver on the Last Chance trail, was as shrewd as he was brave, and bore many scars of wounds received in the discharge of his duty, his nerve and endurance, it was said, saving his life where other men would surely have been killed.

The coach out from Last Chance had gone on its dangerous run with a very large sum in gold dust, but Dave had gotten safely through with it, and was congratulated by all who knew the chances he had taken of losing booty and life.

He had heard with regret, after reaching destination, that he was to be put to an going back, for a large sum of money in

was to be sent back to Last Chance in payment of several mines purchased there by outsiders.

Dave was told that the box contained at least thirty thousand dollars, and so he hid it away as best he could in the coach.

He also was carrying out as freight a dozen rifles of the last and most improved repeating pattern, and double as many revolvers, intended for the vigilantes of Last Chance, and who were personally unknown to any of the miners, though it was suspected that either Landlord Larry, the hotel-keeper, "judge," storekeeper, and proprietor of the largest gambling saloon in the place, or Doctor Dick, the Gambler Gold King, was the secret leader.

Whoever the vigilante captain and his men might be, it was certain that they had a good influence over the most lawless spirits in the mines, the fact of their being unknown greatly aiding their good effect.

Dave Dockery had hoped that he would have a stage load of passengers upon the run to Last Chance, for he liked to have a crowd along, and then he felt that they were a safeguard as well, as in numbers there was strength.

But, when starting time came, only two passengers appeared, one of them a miner going out to Last Chance to hunt for a fortune, and the other a young man who told Dave Dockery that he was only traveling from a love of adventure, and enjoyed the wild life he thus far had met with.

He gave Dave a bunch of good cigars, showed him a silver flask of fine brandy, and was promptly invited to ride upon the box with him, an invitation that was as promptly accepted.

Out of the little settlement rolled the coach, followed by a cheer from the crowd gathered to see it depart, for the going and coming of the coaches in border places are events of great moment to the dwellers there.

The young man in search of adventure was upon the box with Dave, and the miner passenger was inside, where it was safer for him to ride, as he was in a hopeless state of intoxication.

The horses dashed away in fine style, enthused by the cheer of the crowd, and Dave looked happy and proud, while his companion on the box appeared to enjoy the scene immensely.

The young stranger was well dressed, for he had donned what was suitable for frontier roughing it, and wore in his belt a single revolver, as a means of defense rather than for show or bravado.

He had a fine face, fearless and frank, and looked like a man of refinement and education.

Dave Dockery was a good reader of human nature and took to his passenger at once, being really greatly pleased with his companionship.

Three-fourths of the trail had been gone over without adventure, the three stops at the relay stations for changes of horses and meals for passengers having

been made on time, and Last Chance was but a dozen miles away, as they neared a dreary-looking spot in a gorge.

Suddenly a sharp report rang out and Dave Dockery fell back upon the coach and lay motionless, while out of the shadows spurred a horseman dressed in black and wearing a red mask.

With his revolver leveled at the stranger he said sharply:

"Your turn next, sir, for I am out for blood and gold."

Riding on the box with Dave Dockery, the young stranger had heard much of the wild ways of the border, and had been told that it would be madness to resist a "hold-up" of a coach, unless the chances were well on the side of those attacked.

When, therefore, the sharp report of a revolver had been followed by the toppling over of poor Dave, and a masked horseman rode out of the shadows of the cliff, his revolver covering him, the young man did not just know what to do.

He had with him a few hundred in money, his watch, chain and a few articles of value, with some papers of importance.

That the masked horseman was alone he could not believe, and yet he had, against all traditions of the border, begun by firing upon Dave Dockery, and not ordering him to halt first.

That he had fired to kill, the bullet wound in the breast, and the motionless form of the driver, as he lay back upon the top of the coach, were in evidence.

Now he stood the chance himself of life and death, and he awaited the ordeal with white, but calm face.

The horses had stopped in their tracks, and though no other persons were visible the stranger looked for others to appear.

The thought flashed across him that he must lose all he had with him, but his life he could not believe was in danger, yet, why the masked road-agent had killed Dockery without mercy he could not understand.

"Do you mean to take my life, man?"

"That depends whether it is worth more to kill you than to let you live," was the business-like reply.

But hardly had he spoken when from out of the coach window came a flash and report. The miner within, awakening to a sense of his danger, had taken a hand in the affair.

The bullet barely missed the head of the masked horseman, who at once returned the fire, aiming first, however, at the young man on the box.

With a groan the latter fell heavily to the ground, his revolver half-drawn from his holster, and the murderer, leaping from his saddle took refuge among the horses while he called out:

"I have killed your two comrades, and you share the same fate unless you surrender."

"I cry quits, pard," came in frightened tones from

the coach, and the man was evidently now sobered and greatly alarmed.

"Then come out!"

The miner quickly threw open the stage door, put his foot upon the step and then peered cautiously toward his foe.

Instantly there came a shot, and, without a moan, he pitched forward head foremost and fell in a heap between the wheels.

"Any more?" called out the road-agent, sternly.

No answer came, and, revolvers in hand, he stepped to one side and opened fire at the coach.

He fired with both hands, and did not cease until he had emptied his weapons and riddled the coach.

Then he unslung his rifle from his saddle-horn and cautiously approached, ready to fire at the first sign of danger to himself.

But he had done his work but too well, and he had nothing to fear, so advancing to the coach, found that it was empty.

Quickly he set about searching the vehicle for all of value that it might carry.

He found a roll of bills belonging to the miner, and a few things of value in his valise.

The young man panned out for him nearly a thousand in money, and some jewelry, and Dave Dockery was pretty well supplied with funds.

But the masked marauder searched rapidly on, and evidently looked for a richer haul yet.

The box was found with the money in it, and a bullet fired from his revolver shattered the lock.

"Ah! here is a haul worth all risks to get," he muttered, and the contents of the chest were put in a sack and tied upon his saddle.

His work thus far had taken but a few minutes, and, apparently satisfied with what booty he had secured, he shot one of the wheel horses, to prevent the team going on with the coach, and, mounting the splendid animal he rode, and which was covered, head and all, with a black calico covering, he dashed away down the pass at a gallop.

Hardly had the masked road-agent ridden away, when a deep groan came from the lips of Dave Dockery.

His eyes opened, and after a supreme effort, which cost him the greatest agony, as moans would force themselves through his shut teeth, he was able to slip down from the box to the ground.

He knelt by the side of the man who had been his companion a few minutes before, full of life and vigor, and found him motionless.

Then he crept on hands and knees to the side of the miner.

"Dead!" came from between his clinched teeth.

After several efforts he arose by aid of a wheel to his feet, and taking a piece of paper and pencil from his pocket, wrote a few lines upon it with the greatest of difficulty.

Making his way, supported by the coach, step by step to the wheel horse that stood chained to his dead comrade, he unhitched him from the pole, fastened the slip of paper to the bridle, and gave him a blow.

"Go! old horse, for I cannot ride you; I am too weak to hold myself on your back.

"Go for help to Last Chance, and maybe if you hurry you may save my life."

The horse seemed to understand what was said to him and started off at a swift trot down the trail.

He was just disappearing from sight when Dockery, unable to longer stand up, tottered and fell by the side of the trail, writhing in his agony.

And while he lay thus, the faithful horse increased his speed to a gallop and went along thus for miles, his trace-chains rattling an accompaniment to his hoof falls as he followed the trail to Last Chance.

Halting at a stream here and there for a drink of cool water, and at a grassy bank for a few mouthfuls of food, the horse held on his way, and a couple of hours after his departure from the coach, galloped into the mining camp.

Those who saw him with the harness on felt sure that some harm had befallen the coach, and they hastened after the animal, who, avoiding capture, dashed up to the hotel door and halted.

Lawrence Larrimore, nicknamed Landlord Larry, had seen him coming, and grasped his bridle-rein as he halted.

He had caught sight of the white slip of paper tied upon the bridle, and quickly securing it, read what was written thereon in the weak and wavering hand of the wounded driver, but which was recognized as the writing of Dave Dockery.

It was as follows, for Landlord Larry read it aloud, as the miners quickly gathered about him:

"Coach held up at Bud Benton's grave, and I fatally wounded.

"One passenger on box killed; miner in coach, also.

"Coach robbed of large sum.

"Road-agent was alone, wore black domino and red mask, horse also masked, but feel sure I know him.

"I have just strength to write this and beg quick aid, sending by one of my wheelers.

"Come quickly if you hope to find me alive.

"DAVE."

A roar went up from the crowd of miners at the reading of this note from Dave Dockery, who even then might be dying, and Landlord Larry cried:

"Spread the alarm, and let us go quickly to the spot, and try and save poor Dave, yes, and capture that masked road-agent, for he has got money in plenty.

"Oh! if Doctor Dick was only here to look after poor Dave, he might save him.

"Let me see! the coach was due at Bud Benton's grave about two o'clock and it is now after three.

"Come, men, mount and follow me!"

Dave Dockery was liked by all, and Landlord Larry was a very popular man; so, quickly, the miners obeyed the call to follow the one to the rescue of the other.

Just as the party of mounted men were about to ride away from the hotel, under the leadership of Landlord Larry, a shout was heard down the valley, and then came the cry from a score of men.

"There comes Doctor Dick!"

With an exclamation of pleasure Landlord Larry put spurs to his horse and dashed forward to meet the doctor, who warmly grasped his hand as the two met and called out:

"What is it, Landlord Larry?"

"Read this paper from Dave Dockery, who even now may be dead. We are going to his aid now."

"And I will go with you."

"But your horse is worn out, Doc, and you look tired after your long trail."

"Don't mind me, for I will mount a fresh horse and follow," and Doctor Dick rode rapidly toward his own cabin.

The eyes of the miners followed the doctor on his rapid ride to his quarters, with a look as though all depended upon him.

They had come to almost revere this handsome, stern, mysterious man who had come to dwell among them, yet seemed so well-fitted to adorn a far different life.

His life was as a sealed book to them, yet his skill as a physician and surgeon was great, his generosity unbounded, and his nerve and daring far above those with whom he had been forced to meet in deadly encounter.

He had made his home in a snugly built cabin under the shelter of a cliff within easy walk of the hotel, where he took his meals.

He had fitted his frontier home with an extravagance and comfort that was surprising, and had in a cabin near several as fine horses as could be found among the mining-camps, with a Chinese servant to look after them and his wants.

The doctor hastily dismounted, called to the Chinaman to throw his saddle upon another horse and look after the pack-animal, entered the cabin for a few moments, and before Landlord Larry and his party were a couple of miles away was in rapid pursuit.

He did not spare his horse, and overtaking the crowd of half-a-hundred miner horsemen, he was greeted with a cheer, which he acknowledged by gracefully raising his sombrero.

Riding to the front of the column he took his place by the side of Landlord Larry, and set a faster pace than that at which they had been going.

"You say that Dave Dockery was able to write a note, landlord?"

"Yes, I handed it to you to-day."

"I thrust it into my pocket unread," and Doctor Dick now glanced over the note as he rode along.

"I fear he is too far gone, Larry, for if he had been able he would have come into the camp."

"I will ride still faster, for every moment counts with a badly wounded man, and you see I am mounted on my racer."

"Push on, do, Doc, and I'll follow with the men as fast as I can," cried the landlord.

With a word to Racer the horse was off like an arrow and fairly flew up and down hill along the rugged trail to reach the scene of the tragedy and lend aid to the wounded driver.

At last the coach came in sight, and the coming miners were yet all of two miles behind.

The four coach horses, still attached to the pole, stood where they had been left by their driver, while the wheel horse shot by the road-agent lay where he had fallen.

Near the coach, to one side, and not twenty paces from where Bud Benton had been killed, lay the form of Dave Dockery.

Throwing himself from his saddle, Doctor Dick bent over him and said quickly:

"He still lives!"

"Dave! Dave! speak to me!"

The eyes slowly opened, and there was a convulsive movement of the form, a struggle, which becoming violent, caused the doctor to grasp him firmly, and thus hold him.

The dying man seemed in an agony of despair at being unable to speak, and after a slight resistance ceased his efforts and sank back exhausted.

"Here, Dave, take this, for it will revive you," and Doctor Dick poured some medicine between the white lips.

As he did so a groan from another quarter startled him, and glancing in the direction from whence it came he saw the form of the young passenger, who had been riding on the box, quiver slightly.

In an instant he sprang to the side of the other sufferer and bent over him, placing his hand upon his pulse.

"The bullet struck him in the forehead, glancing along the skull and coming out, I see, at the back of the head."

"It remains to see whether the bone is fractured—ah! here they come," and up dashed Landlord Larry and those who had kept up with him.

"How goes it, doctor?"

"Dave is beyond hope, I fear, while this gentleman is alive, though I do not know yet how seriously wounded."

"That man in rough clothes there is dead, as you can see at a glance; but come, we will get the wounded men into the stage at once, and I will drive on to the camps."

"And the road-agents?"

"By all means send a party to hunt them down," was the stern rejoinder.

All knew that Doctor Dick was a skillful driver, and that he would take the coach into Last Chance sooner than any one else could, so they hastened to get the team ready.

The harness on the horse, which had been the dumb messenger to make known the tragedy, had been brought back, and two of the miners' horses were quickly put in as wheelers, while the wounded driver and passenger were tenderly lifted into the coach.

In got a couple of miners to support them in their arms, while the body of the man killed by the road-agents was put upon the top of the coach.

Landlord Larry had himself led the party in search of the trail of the road-agents, while, mounting the box, and leaving his horse to follow on behind, Doctor Dick sent the team along at a slapping pace for Last Chance Claim.

As they went along they met other miners coming out to the scene, but these were turned back, as there was no need of their going, and Landlord Larry had with him all that was needed.

It was just nightfall when the coach rolled by the door of the hotel, while, to the surprise of all, Doctor Dick did not draw rein there.

Instead he went on to his own cabin and came to a halt, while he said to the miners who accompanied him:

"If the lives of these two men are to be saved, it will only be by skill and devoted nursing, and I want them near me.

"Bring over two cots from the hotel, and we will soon make them as comfortable as possible."

The two cots were soon brought, the wounded men tenderly lifted out, and the coach driven to the stables by a miner, while Doctor Dick set to work to see just what he could do for his patients.

All knew that Driver Dave Dockery was a great favorite of the gambler doctor and the remark was made:

"He'll save Dave if it can be done, and he's the man to do it."

Left alone with his patients, save his Chinese assistant, Doctor Dick threw off his coat and set to work in earnest to see what he could do for them, and how seriously they were wounded.

He first went to Dave Dockery.

The driver lay as quiet as though asleep.

Placing his hand upon his heart, and then his ear close to his breast, Doctor Dick said, calmly:

"It is the sleep of death."

With only a moment of thought, he straightened out the limbs, closed the eyes, folded the once strong, bronzed hands over the broad breast, and throwing a blanket over the form, said to his Chinese servant, speaking in the Chinese tongue, and speaking it well:

"Loo Foo, my friend is dead."

The Chinaman replied in his idea of English, not in his own tongue:

"Allee lightee, dockee, him wellee happy now allee samee 'Melican man angel."

Loo Foo had been converted, it was said, when he carried on the business of washee-washee in a mining-camp, for, as he had expressed it:

"More lovee 'Melican man Joss, gettee more washee."

Going from the body of Dave Dockery, Doctor Dick bent over the form of the wounded stranger.

He found him lying in a state of coma, breathing heavily and apparently very badly wounded.

Examining the wound, Doctor Dick saw that the bullet had glanced on the forehead, as has been said, run along under the scalp to the back of the skull and there cut its way out.

Dressing the wound carefully, and using restoratives, the doctor soon had the satisfaction of discovering that his patient was rallying; and within an hour's time his eyes opened, and he looked about him in a bewildered way.

Passing his hand slowly over his face, he seemed trying to get together his scattered thoughts, for he muttered something to himself and then suddenly burst into a violent fit of laughter.

"Great God! he will live, but as a madman," cried Doctor Dick, moved by the sight of the strong man's brain having been crazed by the wound he had received.

Having made him as comfortable as possible, he left Loo Foo on watch and went over to the saloon to report the result.

CHAPTER IV.

AN EXPLANATION DEMANDED.

When Doctor Dick reached the saloon, where one-half the miners of Last Chance were wont to congregate at night, he found it more crowded than usual.

Many had assembled there who did not generally frequent the place, preferring the quiet of their own cabins in the evening after a hard day's work.

These were brought there now by the happenings of the day, and the tragedy was being discussed in all its details, with the possibilities of the recovery of the driver and the young passenger, and the capture of the bold outlaws.

The fact that Dave Dockery had hinted in his note to Landlord Larry that he could possibly tell who the masked road-agent was, was a cause of considerable excitement to all, for it would doubtless fall on one in Last Chance to be the accused.

A hush fell upon the crowd as Doctor Dick entered, and the few who were gambling, for there were but a few that night, left their cards on the table to hear what would be said.

"Pards," said the doctor, in his courtly way, "I am

just from my cabin, where I have left one of the wounded men dead, the other a madman."

A breathless silence followed these words, and then a voice broke it with:

"Doc, who is the dead man?"

"Dave Dockery."

A low murmur of regret and sorrow passed over the crowd, and the doctor added:

"He died soon after reaching the cabin."

"And t'other, doc?"

"The bullet struck him in the head, slightly fracturing the bone, I fear, yet indenting it and causing a loss of reason, which I fear may never return to him."

"Poor fellow! better be dead, like poor Dave," said one, and this view was the thought of all.

"Pards, prepare for Dave's funeral to-morrow, and out of respect for him, let us close the saloon to-night, for I know Landlord Larry would wish it so."

A general murmur of assent followed, and the doctor continued:

"I wish two men as couriers at once, one to carry a note to Landlord Larry, for he can go to the scene of the hold-up, and start on the trail from there as soon as it is light enough to see."

"I'll go, Doc," said a cheery voice, and a young man came forward.

"Thank you, Wall; go with me to my cabin and I'll give you the note.

"Now, I wish a man to go as courier to Fort Faraway, and remember it is a dangerous and long ride."

"I hain't afreered of the danger, or the ride, Doc, so I'm yer man," said a burly fellow, coming forward, and his words were greeted with a cheer.

Doctor Dick glanced at him and then said very calmly:

"Thank you, Brassy, but I do not care to accept your services."

"And just why?"

"In the first place I desire to send a letter to Buffalo Bill, and you have expressed openly your hatred for him, for not allowing you to have your way in certain matters."

"I doesn't allow my hates to interfere with duty."

"I do not care to accept your services, Brassy."

"Now, I asks a reason why?"

"I have given you one."

"I wants another."

"Is this a demand?"

"It be."

"You shall have it."

"Then don't beat round the bush, but have the narve to come out with it like a man."

All looked at Brassy with amazement.

He had been drinking and evidently was just full enough to be reckless and want trouble.

The doctor smiled, but answered complacently:

"I always answer a demand, Brassy, so will tell you

frankly, that I would not trust you with any message whatever."

The words fell pat from the lips of the doctor, and there was no misunderstanding them, and Brassy did not, for with a yell he shouted:

"Yer shall eat them insultin' words, Doctor Dick!" and quick as action could be, he had drawn his revolver and fired.

The crowd had fallen back from about each man at Brassy's cry, and yet one man caught the bullet intended for the doctor in his shoulder.

It was not a second after the shot of Brassy before the doctor's weapon rang out.

He had not expected Brassy to open fire so quickly, so was not prepared for defense, but he was just so little behind him in time, that before the man could pull trigger a second time, he fired, and his bullet went straight where aimed, between the eyes of the one he intended to kill, when he dropped his hand upon his revolver.

Brassy's pistol fired a second shot as he fell, but it was from the death clutch upon the trigger, and the bullet went over the heads of the crowd, while instantly was heard the doctor's quiet tones:

"Come, men, who volunteers as courier to Faraway?"

A young man stepped promptly forward and answered:

"I was a soldier at Faraway, sir, and know the trail. I will go."

"You are the very man, Harding; come with Wall to my cabin."

"Good-night," gentlemen, and remember, I pay the expenses of Brassy's funeral, so do not be mean in his burial outfit."

With this Doctor Dick raised his sombrero and left the saloon, his admirers being still more impressed with his nerve and bearing after what had occurred.

The body of Brassy was removed to his cabin by those who were his friends, and all could not but agree that he had brought his sudden fate upon himself, as the first reason given, of his hatred to Buffalo Bill, was excuse enough for refusing him as a courier.

The saloon was closed, and the other gambling and drinking-places followed the example set and also closed their doors for the night, so that quiet soon rested in the mining-camps of Last Chance.

In the meanwhile, Doctor Dick, accompanied by Wall and Harding, had gone to his quarters, where Loo Foo was found making a cup of tea, alone with the dead and wounded, and seemingly unmindful of the fact.

Entering the cabin, the doctor drew the blanket back from the form of poor Dave Dockery and revealed to the two couriers the honest, brave face of the driver.

"Poor Dave."

"He is on his last trail now," he said, softly, and seating himself at his table he hastily wrote two letters.

One read:

"DEAR LARRY:

"Dave died soon after reaching my cabin.

"If you do not find trace of the outlaws by sunset, it would be well to return, sooner, if you can get no clew whatever.

"I send Harding to Fort Faraway, with a note to Buffalo Bill, as I promised to do, if there was another hold-up on the Overland Trail.

"I had to kill Brassy to-night, but Wall will explain the circumstances.

"Get back to poor Dave's funeral at sunset to-morrow, if possible.

"I closed saloon to-night out of respect to Dave.

"The young passenger will be a mad man if he recovers.

"Yours,

DOCTOR DICK."

The note to Buffalo Bill told of the hold-up on the stage trail, the death of one passenger, wounding of another and killing of Dave Dockery, and closed with:

"Landlord Larry is on the trail of the outlaws, and all will be done to hunt them down that it is possible to do.

"I will drive the coach back on the run, and until another driver can be found.

"If you cannot come now, state what you think best to be done and it will be attended to

"Yours,

DOCTOR DICK."

The couriers left as soon as the letters were received, and having seen them depart, Doctor Dick went over to the hotel to get his supper, which Loo Foo had ordered for him, after which he returned, looked at his patient, gave him a dose of medicine, and throwing himself upon his bed was soon fast asleep, wholly oblivious, it seemed, of the dead man and the sufferer within a few feet of him.

The courier on the trail of Landlord Larry found him and his half-hundred miners, trailing the mountains and valleys over in search of some trace of the coming of the road-agents to the scene of the tragedy, and their going therefrom.

But the search of the evening before, and up to the arrival of Wall at noon, when they had gone into camp, had been wholly in vain.

Not a hoof track could be found of the road-agents' horses, nor a place where they had lain in wait until the stage came along.

Landlord Larry was not one to waste energy upon impossibilities, and after reading Doctor Dick's letter he decided to return with his men to Last Chance.

They set out soon after the midday rest, and arrived in Last Chance just as all was in readiness for the burial of Dave Dockery and Brassy, for a double funeral was to be had.

The landlord dismissed his men and went at once

to the quarters of Doctor Dick, who greeted him warmly and asked:

"Any success?"

"Not a bit."

"Too bad."

"We could not find the photograph of a trail, and to search longer was a waste of time, so as the men wished to go to Dave's funeral, I just came in."

"It was about all you could do under the circumstances, Larry."

"I see that they have got the corpse you furnished rigged out for burial too."

"Brassy?"

"Yes."

"Why not, for he has a number of friends?"

"Don't fear no trouble, do yer?"

"No, I think not, for Brassy prescribed for himself and I administered the medicine."

"Served him right for playing with edged tools."

"I will not say that, poor fellow, for life was dear to him; but he should have been more careful."

"We will go together to the burial."

"By all means, and I'll give my friends a hint to be ready if Brassy's pards go to showing an ugly mood, while you will go prepared, Doc?"

"I always am," was the laconic response.

"Now, how's yer sick man?"

"He will recover bodily, but never mentally, I fear."

"I'm sorry," and Landlord Larry went to prepare for the burial.

In half an hour all was ready to start, and Doctor Dick and Landlord Larry were given the places of honor at the procession, or rather just following what was called "the Band," and which consisted of a dozen men who sung the music, the leader alone playing on a cornet.

At the command of the doctor, who was the master of ceremonies, the procession moved off to the music of

"I would not live away,"

really beautifully rendered, for there were some splendid voices in the band, and the cornet leader was a master of the instrument.

Following were the miners, marching eight abreast, eight men bearing the body of Dick Dockery, borne on a litter on their shoulders.

The body was incased in a board coffin, and behind followed eight men likewise carrying the body of Brassy.

Up the canyon to the cemetery beneath the cliffs filed the column at funeral pace, keeping time to the splendid voices, that changed from air to air as they marched along, and which echoed and re-echoed among the hills.

The burying-ground was reached, the bodies placed by the side of the graves dug for them, and Landlord Larry consigned them to their last resting-place by

repeating the words of the burial service over them, no partiality being shown.

But when the coffin, with the weapons, hat and whip of Dave Dockery was lowered into the grave, hundreds of bold, brawny men stepped forward and threw in upon it bunches of wild flowers they had gathered, and, when filled up, the little mound was covered from view by these sweet offerings of manly regard for the dead driver, while in strange contrast was the barren grave of Brassy, for his immediate friends had not thought of gathering flowers, there being no sentiment in his death.

Doctor Dick looked calmly on, and perhaps it was his stern, fearless mien that stayed the trouble that several of Brassy's pardes seemed to have decided upon there in the sacred resting-place of the dead, perhaps the belief that they would be quickly sent to join their comrade, for they created no disturbance, only with a significant glance at the Gold-King Gambler, as Dick was called, turned and walked away with the bearing of men who would bide their time to avenge.

CHAPTER V.

THE COURIER.

The man who volunteered to take the long and dangerous ride to Fort Faraway, to carry a letter to Buffalo Bill, had ridden along steadily after leaving Last Chance, until a couple of hours before day.

Then he halted, staked his horse out, and wrapping himself in his blanket, went to sleep.

For several hours he slept serenely, then, awaking, he cooked his breakfast and was soon again in the saddle.

He seemed to understand frontier craft perfectly, and to appreciate just what his horse could stand, so did not press him too hard.

Camping at nightfall, he was again on the trail at daybreak, and held steadily on during the day.

Another night camp and he rode into Fort Faraway the next morning before the hour of noon.

He was directed at once to the quarters of Buffalo Bill, and though, having been a soldier there, he recognized many old friends, he saw that, dressed as he then was, and with his beard grown out, the recognition was not mutual.

But the moment he entered the presence of Buffalo Bill, he was recognized and warmly greeted, for the scout had always liked the young soldier, who had been given his discharge on account of a severe wound received in an Indian fight, which it was thought would render him lame for life.

"Well, Harding, I am glad to see you, and you deserve credit for the plucky ride you have made.

"How is the old wound getting on now?"

"All right, Bill, for I am not ~~at~~ all lame, I am glad to say."

"And you are getting rich, I suppose?"

"Well, no, but I have laid up some money in mining, only I cannot stand upon my wounded leg long at a time, and so I am going to ask you to take me on as a scout under your command, if you can do so."

"Harding, you are just the man I want, and you are in that very place where I need you, so you can return to your mine, and pretend to work as before, for there is where I wish you to serve me, since I received this letter from Doctor Dick."

"Thank you, Pard Cody, for your kindness, and will be glad to do as you wish; but may I ask a favor?"

"Certainly."

"It is that no one knows that I am in your service, not even Landlord Larry or Doctor Dick, for I can work better, I am sure."

"It might be a good idea to have it so, and it shall be as you wish, for you can do better work as a spy, and I have full confidence in you, Harding. But we will talk over just what it is best to do, when I have reported to Major Randall the holding up of the coach, and killing of Dave Dockery and the others."

Buffalo Bill then left the courier and went to headquarters, where he held a long conversation with the commandant of the post.

Returning to his own quarters, he said to Harding, who was awaiting him:

"Well, pard, the major has heard the whole story, and he has left it to me to go in my own way about running down these road-agents, for, though but one was seen there were evidently more at the hold-up."

"I do not doubt that, for one man would be a bold one to alone make an open attempt to hold up a coach with Dave Dockery on the box, and knowing that he had passengers with him."

"Well, Harding, you are to return to Last Chance and give letters I will write to Landlord Larry, and I wish you to go to work in my service, and secret service it must be, as you said, no one knowing that you are doing else than carrying on your mining as before. I will give you a paper which will protect you, for Major Randall will indorse it officially, and you can use it in case of trouble, or necessity, not otherwise."

"I thank you, friend Bill, and I'll be discreet, I promise you; but now there is another thing I wish to tell you, and to ask what you think of it."

"Well, what is it, Harding?"

"Do you believe that Sergeant Wallace Weston is dead?" was the query, in a low, earnest tone.

Buffalo Bill fairly started at the unexpected secret asked him by Hal Harding, the miner, and gazing intently at him, asked:

"Why do you ask such a question, Harding?"

"I will tell you when you answer my question, Mr. Cody."

"Whether I believe Sergeant Wallace Weston dead?"

"Yes, sir."

"I do."

"You have good reason for believing it, then?"

"I have."

"Please tell me what it is."

"As you have some motive above curiosity in asking, I will do so, Harding," and Buffalo Bill told the whole story of Sergeant Weston's escape from execution, and the finding of a body in his uniform upon the desert, and burying it.

But he added:

"I confess, Harding, after a talk with Doctor Dick upon the subject, I was led to doubt to a certain degree the death of the sergeant, and even followed a trail which I supposed was his."

"With what result, sir?"

"That we found the trail led to a mine which had caved in and crushed the cabin home of those who dwelt there!"

"When was this, sir?"

"But a short while ago."

"Do you mind giving me the date?"

Buffalo Bill took a notebook from his pocket and gave the exact date.

"Now, Harding, you have some knowledge upon this subject, a secret to tell."

"Yes, sir."

"Out with it."

"You will keep it in confidence, between us two?"

"Certainly."

"You know that the sergeant was my friend, that he had saved my life twice in battle, and I loved him as I did a brother?"

"I remember."

"No man knew him better than I did in the fort, for we were boon comrades for over a year, and I knew his features perfectly, and more, other marks of identification about him."

"Yes."

"The sergeant had one mark that he was sensitive about, and kept hidden from all, though I saw it several times."

"What was it?"

"He had a peculiar way of dressing his hair, with a curl hanging over his forehead."

"I remember it."

"Beneath that curl, sir, was a birthmark."

"Ah!"

"It was a peculiar one that was a red cross, an inch in length upon his forehead, and perfect in shape."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, and I saw that same mark on a man's forehead a few days before the date you say that Sergeant Weston, if it was he, was buried in the caved-in mine."

"Ah! and where did you see it?"

"I had gone to Wingate by coach, sir, to collect some money due me from several soldiers there, and in the sutler's store I saw a man whose face I was sure I had seen before."

"He wore his hair and beard long, and seemed to stoop badly, or was round shouldered; but the form otherwise was the same, so were the eyes and shape of the head, with a round gold setting the size of a pin's head, in one of the front teeth."

"Reading a letter that seemed to impress him, he took off his hat and pushed his hair back, and I saw the red cross mark on his forehead."

"I went up to see him as though to attract his attention, but he looked at me as though he had never seen me before, yet his face flushed and paled as he looked."

"Now, Mr. Cody, that man was none other than Sergeant Weston, and I'll swear to it, but I would not tell any other man than you, for if he escaped death no one is more glad of it than I, unless——"

"Unless what, Harding?"

"Unless, a poor man, and a hunted one, he turned road-agent and was the man who held up the coach, killing Dave Dockery."

"No, Harding, I can hardly believe that of him, and then, too, the coach was just held up, and this man, with his pard, perished in the cave-in of their mine."

"Well, sir, if it was in my power to capture Sergeant Weston, never would I lay hand upon him, and I believe you feel the same way, unless it was your orders to do so."

"Still, somehow, the thought came to me that, a fugitive, and friendless, he might have turned outlaw."

"I do not think so, and I am sure now that, if it was Weston who came to my aid, when I was attacked by an outlaw gang a short time ago, and whom you saw, that he perished in the mine; but now let us go over what I wish you to do, and my plan to run down these road-agents, who, I am sure, are from Last Chance Claim and nowhere else," said Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER VI.

"OLD HUCKLEBERRY."

A pall seemed to have fallen over Last Chance, in the death of Dave Dockery, and its life began to flag in gloom.

Seeing this, and fearing that the hold-up of the coach might injure the mines, Landlord Larry decided to get up a scheme to attract outsiders to the mines, and so the rumor went out of a large find of gold in one of the canyons near the town.

A couple of miners only were put there to work it, and the claim was known as the "Doctor Dick Mine," as the Gold King at once bought from the landlord a half interest in it.

This news stirred the miners to increased exertions in their own mines, and also caused prospectors to go out on the search for new "finds."

The wounded passenger continued to steadily improve bodily, under the skill and kind care of Doctor Dick, but mentally his mind was a wreck, and no one believed that he would ever regain his reason.

Doctor Dick hinted at an operation some day that might relieve the pressure upon the brain, yet spoke of it also as an experiment and a dangerous one, only to be tried as a last resort.

The passenger was as docile as a child, gave no trouble, and simply sat about whittling sticks into the shape of a revolver, his only occupation.

At last the week passed by, when the stage was to start again upon its run eastward.

A number of miners had volunteered as an escort, but Doctor Dick said he would drive on the run out and come back as a passenger, and he did not expect trouble, so would not accept an armed escort.

The night before the stage was to start, Harding, the courier to Fort Faraway, returned.

He brought with him a letter from Buffalo Bill to Doctor Dick, and another for Landlord Larry, stating that the troops at the fort were pressed just then with extra duty, as the Indians were in an angry mood, and for them to do what they could for the protection of the coaches until Major Randall, who was in command at the fort, could investigate and patrol the trail.

Harding had little to say of his visit to the fort, more than to hint that the soldiers were too much occupied just then with their own affairs to care much for the killing of a stage-driver and couple of passengers.

As no government funds had been taken by the outlaws, the miners would have to look to their own protection, for a while at least.

The courier also stated that there were stories at the fort of secret finds of gold in and about Last Chance, and he would give up his intention, expressed some time before, of selling out his mining interests, and instead, stick to hard work, in the hope of striking it rich in the end.

The next morning the coach was to start, and as it was to go out at an early hour many of the miners decided to remain up all night gambling to see it leave, for it would be the Sabbath day, when they could rest.

Doctor Dick had been too busy of late with his patient and others matters, to devote much time to gambling, and so he also decided to make a night of it at the gambling tables.

When the dawn came many regretted that he had done so, for never had he played more recklessly, and never before had he been such a large winner, for luck seemed to go his way from the start.

Play what game he might he was a winner, and going from table to table he "broke the combination" as one of the miners expressed it.

The dawn was at hand when he went to his cabin for a bath, and in half an hour he came back to the hotel for breakfast, looking little like a man who had passed the night over a gambling table.

He was dressed in his best, was well armed, and coming out from a hearty breakfast lighted a cigar and mounted to the stage box at a single bound, an act that gained for him a cheer upon his agility.

"All ready, Landlord Larry," he called out as he gathered up the reins, and the answer was:

"No passengers, mails aboard, go!"

Doctor Dick gathered up the reins in a way that showed him a master of the art of driving.

He looked very dashing and handsome, as he sat on the box, his long hair falling upon his shoulders and his face devoid of all dread of what he might have to encounter upon his run.

He puffed the blue smoke of his cigar in rings above his head, and with a wave of the hand at the word, "Go," gave the whip lash a quick whirl and made the crack resound like a pistol shot.

The six horses bounded forward and a wild yell of admiration of the volunteer driver's pluck went up from the crowd.

As the coach rolled down the valley the miners come out from their cabins and gave him a cheer, and it was a constant, continuous yell along the line until he had left the last camp behind him.

The six fine horses had been sent along at a rapid pace until the camps were left behind, the doctor showing his great skill as a driver in dashing over places, and around corners where others had found it safer to go slow, but when the last cabin disappeared the team was brought down to a jog, for the way was long before them.

The scene of the last tragedy was passed at a walk, the doctor glancing calmly at the spot where Dave Dockery had lost his life, along with his passengers.

The first relay was made, and the stock-tender there, who had heard the news of the hold-up from Landlord Larry's men when searching for the road-agents, expressed pleasure at seeing the coach come in safe and with Doctor Dick upon the box.

"Anything suspicious about, pard?" asked the doctor.

"No, sir, hain't seen a man around since poor Dave went by on the last run, which was his last run on earth."

"Yes, poor fellow, he is gone."

"You doesn't mean ter say that yer is going ter drive ther run, Doc?"

"Only on this trip, pard, for I have other work to do; but there was no one at Last Chance to take the coach out, so I volunteered."

"And you has the nerve ter run through, while yer handles ther ribbons as though yer was born on a stagebox."

"But yer'll find drivers scarce at t'other end, Doctor Dick, or I'm greatly mistook."

"I hope not," and the fresh team being ready, the doctor pushed on once more.

The second relay station was reached at noon, and here Doctor Dick had his dinner.

He had come over the worst part of the road, as far as the trailway and danger from attack was concerned, but had fifty miles yet before him, where a halt was al-

ways made for the night, as there was a canyon there to go through which could only be driven in the daylight, and the relay of horses taken in the morning had to pull into the station at the end of the run for the driver on the Last Chance end of the line.

But the doctor reached what was known as Canyon End Station soon after dark, and after supper turned in in one of the cots in the cabin provided for passengers, and was soon fast asleep.

He was up at an early hour, had breakfast, lighted a cigar, and with a spanking fine team took the perilous run through the canyon at a trot, driving the twenty miles that ended his run in a little over three hours.

The stage rolling in at a brisk pace to the station at W——, was greeted with cheers, for the news had come from Fort Faraway the day before of Dave Dockery's death, the killing of one passenger, wounding of another, and the robbery of the coach.

The brave man who had dared drive through was greeted with cheers, but he had hardly dismounted from the box when he was informed that he would have to drive back, as there was no driver there who would take the risk at any price.

Other drivers had been sent for, men who were afraid of nothing, but no one had yet been found who would drive the run to Last Chance, which had been set down in the frontier vocabulary as the "Sure Death Trail."

Doctor Dick agreed to drive the coach back on condition that the driver who came to take charge should come on to Last Chance on horseback and be ready to come back with it.

He had shown that he did not fear the drive, but his business and professional duties demanded that he should be at Last Chance, and there he must remain.

He was secretly told by the agent that there was a valuable mail to go through in registered letters, and asked if he dared risk carrying them.

"By all means, sir, for I am driving to do my full duty," was the answer.

So the mail was made up, and at the last moment two passengers applied for seats.

They were strangers in W——, but said they were going to Last Chance to work in the mines, and they were accordingly given seats upon the box, as they preferred to ride outside.

Then the coach started on its return to Last Chance with Doctor Dick still holding the reins.

Having driven over the run once, and knowing what his relay teams could do, he started out to make the regular time on the run.

But there was alarm felt at Last Chance when half an hour had passed over schedule time and the coach did not put in an appearance, and nothing was seen of it on the three miles of trail visible down the valley.

When an hour passed the anxiety became great, for

all conjectured that Doctor Dick had met the fate of Bill Benton and Dave Dockery.

Some said that the delay was because the doctor was new on the road, and this appeared to be a solution of the coach not coming in.

But Landlord Larry grew more and more anxious, and at last decided to go out with a party on a search for the delayed coach.

But, just as the men were told to get their horses, a shout arose down the valley that the coach was seen approaching, and soon after a cloud of dust was visible drifting along the stage trail.

A shout arose, for it showed that at least some one was there, whatever had happened, to drive the coach in.

Then those who had said the delay was caused by the doctor being new to the trail began to crow, but only for a while, as Landlord Larry, who was gazing through a fieldglass at the approaching stage, called out:

"There are but four horses—two are missing for some reason."

It was now all conjecture as to the cause of delay, with every one in the dark as to the real cause.

Again Landlord Larry had something to say, and it was to the effect that the coach was not dashing along with its accustomed speed in coming in at the end of the trail, that Doctor Dick was on the box, and alone, while he seemed to drive in a very careful manner, very different from his going away on his drive out.

Nearer and nearer came the coach up the valley, every eye upon it, and all wondering, guessing and asserting their views of what had happened.

"The doctor is there, that is certain," said one.

"Two horses have been killed," another remarked.

"He may have lost them in the bad roads," was an answer.

"Perhaps they were shot down by road-agents."

"He has no passengers."

"See how he drives."

"He's coming on as slow as a snail."

"See, he is driving with one hand."

"What does that mean?"

"His left hand is hanging by his side."

"He has surely been wounded."

And so the comments ran around, as all stood watching the coming coach, which half an hour after coming in sight rolled up to the hotel, came to a halt and was greeted with a wild chorus of cheers from the assembled miners.

Doctor Dick's handsome face was pale, his eyes had a haggard look and his teeth were firmly set.

They knew that he had passed through some dread ordeal, and a silence fell upon all, waiting for him to speak.

They saw that his left arm was carried in a sling, his handkerchief knotted around his neck, and that a red stain was upon his sleeve.

Furthermore they saw that the two wheel horses were missing, the center pair having been put back in their place.

Upon opening the stage door to see if there were any passengers, Landlord Larry started back as the dead form of a man pitched out on his head.

The door being open it was seen that a second form was in the coach, all in a heap in one corner.

There were red stains upon the steps, and upon the leather cushions, and everything indicated that the stage had run a death gantlet.

But, excepting his pale, stern face, the doctor was as serene as a May morn, though his voice showed weakness when he spoke.

"I'll ask your aid, landlord, for I am weakened from loss of blood. Bind my arm up to stop the flow and I'll see how serious the wound is."

He said no more, but was at once aided from the box and over to his cabin, Landlord Larry leaving his clerk to look after the mails and the dead passengers.

Arriving at the cabin Doctor Dick had his coat sleeve slit open and the bandage he had tied about his arm removed.

His silk shirt sleeve was also cut, and then the wound was revealed in the fleshy part of the arm.

Taking a probe from his case Doctor Dick, after swallowing a glass of brandy, coolly probed the wound, found the ball, and aided by Loo Foo, the Chinese, under his direction, soon extracted the bullet.

Then the wound was skillfully dressed, the arm rested in a sling, and Doctor Dick, lolling back in his easy chair, asked with the greatest *sangfroid*:

"Well, Landlord Larry, how goes all at Last Chance?"

The landlord was amazed at the coolness of the man, and said quickly:

"Oh, Last Chance is O. K.; but it is your run that we are dying to hear about, Doc."

"Well, it was a close call for me, Larry, I admit, for I found foes where I expected friends."

"You were held up?"

"Yes."

"It was the masked road-agents?"

"Not this time."

"Ah, who then?"

"I did not form their acquaintance by name, but perhaps a search of the bodies may reveal."

"You killed them?"

"Two."

"Where are the bodies?"

"I brought them along in the coach."

"I thought they were passengers who had been killed."

"They were."

"How do you mean?"

"They left W—— booked as passengers, but reached Last Chance as deadhead road-agents."

"Now I begin to understand."

"It was your two passengers who attacked you."

"Just so."

"It is a wonder that they did not kill you."

"They would easily have done so, had I not suspected them; but I grew suspicious, and without appearing to do so, watched their every look and move. They said they would lie down on top of the coach and rest, so they spread their blankets and did so. I thought this strange, as just before I had told them we were approaching the scene of the hold-ups. But I kept my eye upon them, and, as we neared the cliff the sun shone brightly down and I distinctly saw the shadows of the two men as they arose and drew their revolvers. I drew mine as quick as a flash, turned, and caught this shot in the arm, while a second bullet whizzed by my head."

The doctor paused in his story, as though recalling the thrilling scene, which had so nearly cost him his life, and a sad look came into his eyes as though he felt that his mission seemed ever to kill.

So lost was he in thought, that Landlord Larry had to recall him to his story by saying:

"It was a very close call for you, Doc."

"A close call indeed, and, but for the shadows on the cliff, revealing the hostility of my two passengers, my death would have followed."

"But, my discovery of their intention, and quickness in facing them, disconcerted them both, destroying their aim, close as they were to me."

"They did not fire again?"

"Oh, yes; several shots, two of which killed my wheelers; but I got in my work by firing two shots also."

"Killing them?"

"Yes, for you will find my bullet brands in their foreheads. The horses had started forward at the shots, and as the wheelers fell, the coach gave a lurch which sent the two men from the top to the ground just as I fired on them. I quieted my team, and first bound my arm up as tightly as I could to stop the flow of blood and then, dismounting, picked up the two dead men, threw them into the coach and drove on. Of course, my wounded arm gave me more and more trouble, and I could not drive but very slowly with one hand, and hence my delay in arrival. But I got in without being robbed, which I am very glad of, for there is a large registered mail on this run. Now I will have Loo Foo fetch me some supper and retire, for I am about played out, and you can search the two men and let me know the result in the morning."

"But one minute—how is my patient?"

"Bodily all right, but his mind, as you said would be the case, is gone."

"Poor fellow! Good night, Larry, and hurry Loo Foo over with my supper, please."

Landlord Larry bade Doctor Dick good-night and departed more than ever impressed with the idea that the Gold King Gambler was a very remarkable man.

Going to his hotel, Landlord Larry found nearly every denizen of Last Chance awaiting him, and a suppressed excitement was apparent in all.

The two bodies had been taken into the hotel office, to await the coming of the landlord, and there they lay covered with a blanket.

The moment Landlord Larry was seen, coming from the cabin of Doctor Dick, cries arose of:

"Speech! Speech!"

"Tell the news, landlord!" and so on.

Larry mounted to the piazza of the hotel, and in a few words told the story of Doctor Dick's running the gantlet and the nerve he had shown in the ordeal he had passed through.

"Oh, he's got ther nerve of Old Nick, as we all knows," cried a miner, and this intended compliment was acquiesced in by one and all.

Having learned the news, the miners adjourned to the saloons and the toasts for the next few hours were to:

"Doctor Dick, a man o' narve from 'way back."

Until a late hour the miners drank and gambled, and then, toward dawn, quiet reigned in the camps, broken only now and then by a yell from some man who was too full of liquor to go to sleep.

The next morning, greatly to the delight of all, Doctor Dick appeared at breakfast and received an ovation.

Loo Foo had dressed his wounded arm, and though sore, it was all right, Doctor Dick said, yet he was pale from loss of blood.

After breakfast he mounted his horse and took the rounds to see his patients, and everywhere he was greeted with a welcome that could not but flatter him.

But the two weeks before date of the return of the coach, for the runs were semi-monthly, passed away and no driver appeared from W—— to carry the stage out, so it began to look very much as though Doctor Dick would have to again take the reins.

The search of the dead bodies of the two road-agents had revealed nothing as to their identity, for, excepting their weapons, a little money, some odds and ends in their pockets, they had nothing of value, or identification about them, and they were buried at the expense of Doctor Dick, who would have it so, as he very laconically remarked:

"As I killed them, I should pay their expenses when they are unable to do so."

At last the day for the starting of the coach came round, and Doctor Dick, as no one else volunteered, expressed his willingness to take the reins, though he remarked:

"This shall be the last run I shall make, so you must get a man here, Landlord Larry, to go, if I do not bring one back with me from W——."

And once more Doctor Dick rolled away with a cheer from his admirers.

He had an uneventful run of it on the way to

W——, and arrived without accident or delay on time at the end of his journey.

He was well received, but the stage-agent at W—— told him not a volunteer had put in an appearance for the place of driver.

Double the price had been offered, but there were no takers, and the agent added:

"You must find some dare-devil at Last Chance who is willing to risk his life upon the box, while rest assured, Doctor Dick, I have reported your noble service for the company in its dire need and it will be appreciated."

"I do not care for pay, or thanks, only I wish to be relieved of a duty I do not like, especially as it interferes with my own work," was the answer.

Just before the time came for the starting of the coach a horseman rode up and dismounted at the stage office.

He was an odd-looking individual, tall, but with a hump on his back, awkward in gait, and dressed in buckskin leggings, hunting shirt and a pair of boots.

His hair was long, bushy, and would have been white but for its soiled appearance, and he had it cropped, or banged in front, like an Indian, or fashionable young miss, to keep it out of his eyes.

His face was clean shaven, but the hue of leather, and he wore a pair of iron-rimmed spectacles.

His slouch hat was worn in reality, for the rim fell down upon his shoulders, save in front, where the flap was turned up and fastened with an army button.

He was armed with a pair of old, but serviceable revolvers, an ugly-looking bowie knife with a deer's horn handle, and combined rifle and shot gun, double-barreled.

Then his horse was as queer as his master in appearance, being a large, raw-boned animal, with patches of hair upon him, a long tangled mane and tail, and devoid of shoes, though his hoofs looked as tough as iron.

The saddle was also a back number, and the stake rope served for a bridle as well.

A lariat hung at the saddle-horn, also a hatchet, and in a large rubber blanket was rolled his bedding, while a bag contained a coffee-pot, frying-pan, tin cup, plate and provisions.

He looked the crowd over as he drew rein, and asked quietly:

"Who's boss o' this lay-out?"

"I am," and the stage-agent stepped forward.

"I hears thet yer wants a man ter drive yer old hearse on ther trail ter Last Chance and back."

"I do."

"I'm yer huckleberry."

"You."

"Yas, me."

"Are you a driver?"

"Ef I wasn't I'd not be sich a durned fool as ter trust myself on a two-story hearse, pard."

"Who sent you here?"

"Nobody, for I hain't one ter be sent."

"Where did you come from?"

"Ther up-country, whar I has been trappin', huntin', prospectin' and killin' a Injin or two—see!"

"And now you wish to turn stage-driver?"

"If it pays what they told me at Fort Faraway I does."

"The pay is good; but have you no references?"

"Yas."

"Where are they?"

"Here."

The old man put his hands upon his revolvers and drew them with a lightning-like motion that surprised the lookers-on.

"They are pretty good references on a pinch, and you may have cause to use them if you drive this trail."

"I has used them before, and I guess I kin do it ag'in," was the quiet response.

"When could you begin?"

"Now."

"What is your name?"

"Old Huckleberry, but the boys calls me Old Huck for short; but durn ther name, call me what yer wants ter, and I'll be thar."

"Well, Pard Huckleberry, I rather like your style, and have a mind to give you a trial."

"Ef yer kin do better, don't do it; but if yer can't, count on me, for as I said afore, I'm yer huckleberry. and ready for the game."

Doctor Dick had been closely looking at the old volunteer and said something in a whisper to the stage-agent, who at once said:

"I'll take you, and the time for starting is almost up."

"I'm ready, only take care of my horse at my expense," and the volunteer dismounted ready for work.

When he mounted the stage box, Doctor Dick yielded to him the reins.

He seized them in a somewhat awkward manner, yet with the air of one who knew just what to do, took the whip, gave it a resounding crack and started off at a brisk pace.

There were four passengers inside, all miners going to Last Chance, lured there by the rumor of richer mines having been found, for the stories were circulating more and more that there were rich finds being discovered there every day.

"That man knows how to handle the reins as well as the best of them, old though he may be and a trifle awkward," said the stage-agent, as he saw the volunteer driver sending his team along at a slapping pace, in spite of the fact that the trail was none of the best along there.

The coach soon disappeared from the sight of those at W——, made the night halt on time, and as soon as he had had his supper the new driver wrapped himself in his blanket and threw himself down out of doors,

declining the invitation of the stock-tender to sleep in the cabin.

He was on his box on time the next morning, and with Doctor Dick by his side, went off on his run.

He was a man disposed to silence, for he did not speak often, unless Doctor Dick addressed him.

But he would ask now and then about the trails, and showed some interest in the gambler king's stories of the different road-agents' attacks upon the way to Last Chance.

He greeted the stock-tenders at the relay stations pleasantly, said he hoped to be with them for some time, and kept the team at the pace set for schedule time.

Passing the scenes of the several tragedies, he drew rein for a few minutes and attentively regarded the surroundings, but drove on again without a word of comment.

Doctor Dick had become more and more interested in the strange driver, had told him all he could about the trail, and time to make going and coming, and was anxious to have him make no mistakes, he said.

He tried to draw him out time and again, but in vain.

All he could learn from him was that he had lived for many years upon the frontier and preferred to do so for reasons best known to himself.

He said he was a trapper, Indian-fighter, hunter and prospector, that was all, and he tried to do his duty in every work he undertook.

More he would not say of himself, and the doctor gave up trying to "pump" him.

When the coach came in sight of Last Chance, Old Huckleberry showed no satisfaction at having made the run in safety, or excitement at driving in for the first time.

He quickened the pace of his team, handled his reins with a skill that won the admiration, as he had all along, of Doctor Dick, and at last came to a halt before the hotel with a whoop and the words:

"Here we be, boss!"

Doctor Dick introduced Old Huckleberry from the box, as soon as the cheer that greeted their arrival had died away.

"Pards, I is glad ter know yer, and I greets yer," and with this Old Huckleberry dismounted from the box and asked at once for the "feed room."

He ate his supper with a relish, smoked his pipe, and declining a bed in the hotel, saying it would smother him to sleep in between walls, took an ax and hatchet, with a few nails, and, going up on the hillside where there was a thicket, soon built for himself a wicky-up that would keep him sheltered even in a storm.

He carried his few traps there, and then stuck up a notice which read:

"OLD HUCKLEBERRY'S CLAIM."

Having completed his quarters, he strolled about

among the saloons and gambling dens, watching the playing, but neither drank nor gambled, and at last, tiring of looking on, went to his roost and turned in for the night, an object of curiosity to all, yet also of admiration, for a man who would volunteer to drive the coach over that trail was one to command respect in Last Chance.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WAY IT WAS DONE.

The new driver drove the run to W—— for several round trips, and not once had he been held up, or seen any sign of a road-agent on the way.

He made the regular time, drove without any accident whatever, attended to his business, associated with no one, or, that is, to be on intimate terms with any one, not even Doctor Dick, and still slept in his little shelter on the hill.

He had fitted this up more comfortably, and said that he felt perfectly at home there, while, on the return from W—— he had led his horse back behind the coach, wishing to have him at Last Chance, where his stay was always two weeks, for there was only a day's stop at the other end of the run.

He was wont to go on long hunts, mounted upon "Rawbones," as he called his horse, and he kept Landlord Larry well supplied with game.

One day as Old Huckleberry was returning to Last Chance, and neared the Dead Line, the scene of the other hold-up, he suddenly threw his rifle to his shoulder and sent a shower of buckshot into a thicket ahead.

A rifle bullet from the other barrel was sent to the other side, and the whip was brought down upon his team in a way that put them into a run.

Seeing them well started, he threw the reins over the brake and with a revolver in each hand opened a fusillade on both sides of the trail, while he called out to his passengers:

"Blaze away into the bushes, durn yer, for thar is game thar ter kill."

All this had not taken over half-a-dozen seconds, and that there was "game" in the thickets, and dangerous game at that was proven by hearing several loud cries of pain, and stern orders given, while men were seen hunting shelter from the unexpected fusillade opened upon them.

There were eight passengers in the coach, and urged by the old driver, several of them obeyed and opened fire from the windows.

The result was that where road-agents had been lying in wait for the coach, and were just about to show themselves and command a halt, they were taken completely by surprise and forced to seek shelter from the leaden messengers flying about them.

The rapid fire, the bold act, and all combined caused the road-agents to believe that there was a coach full of soldiers, that a trap was prepared for them, and ere

they could rally and their leader convince them that it was not so, the coach had gone by the Dead Line the outlaws had made for it and was going along the pass at the full speed of its horses, the reins now in the hands of Old Huck once more.

The passengers all saw the panic-stricken road-agents, half a dozen in number, and encouraged by the boldness of Old Huck, kept up a hot fire, which they felt confident had not been thrown away.

When pursuit was no longer feared, Old Huck drew his team down to a trot, and leaning over called out: "We done 'em up thet time, pards."

The passengers cheered the old driver, and when he drew rein at the hotel in Last Chance they quickly made known his act of heroism, for, throwing the reins upon the backs of his horses, he had gotten down from the box, reported the safe arrival of the coach to Landlord Larry and gone in to his supper.

When the story was told, of how bravely he had run the gantlet, Landlord Larry went in to have a talk with him, but found that he had finished his supper and gone.

It was a cold evening, and there was snow flying, so looking over to the hill where the little shanty of Old Huck was located, Landlord Larry saw a bright fire burning and at once went there.

There sat Old Huck enjoying his pipe and warming his feet before the fire in the clay chimney he had built.

He had a canvas covering the doorway, to keep out the cold and snow, and seemed as contented as could be in his lone quarters.

"Well, old man, you seem happy?" he said.

"Why not?"

"You brought in a valuable freight to-night, in money and registered letters."

"I know it."

"Do you know how much?"

"Ther agent at W—— told me he thought about forty thousand, so I made a rush ter git through."

"And did it grandly."

"That's what I'm paid fer."

"I've heard the story of your running the gantlet and surprising the road-agents."

Old Huck laughed and replied:

"Wall, I calkilate as how they was astonished.

"You see I seen the tracks on the trail, foot-tracks, and fresh ones, goin' on toward the Dead Line, and so I kinder felt sart'in o' a hold-up.

"When I come to ther pass I seen ther top o' a small tree wavin' and knowed somebody were up in it looking over t'other trees.

"So I jist up with old Drop-'em, and I let drive with a handful o' bullets I had dropped into ther shotgun barrel, and I put a piece o' lead on t'other side o' trail, dropped ther ribbons and set my two puppies ter barking, as soon as I hed laid ther silk onto ther team and got 'em inter a run.

"I tell yer, landlord, it were prime fun and no mistake, and as ther insiders helped with their guns, you bet we waltzed through them scared road-agents in a way that crippled 'em, and come in on time.

"That's all ther is of ther story, boss," and Old Huckleberry puffed away at his pipe again in the most unconcerned manner possible.

Hardly had Old Huckleberry finished his simple story of his brave act in saving his passengers, and the coach from robbery when a voice at the door said:

"Ho, old gentleman, I have just heard at the hotel of your splendid work this afternoon and have come to congratulate you."

"Come in, Pard Doc, and camp on that blanket thar before ther fire. I is glad to see yer, but I don't need no congratulations, for I hain't done nothing more than I oughter."

"Well, old man, you saved the lives of your passengers, and a rich freight, I learn, and I know as well as any one how to appreciate what you did, for I have driven the trail, you remember."

"I know it, and done it well."

"I also praised Old Huck, Doc, but he does not care to be thanked; but what is to be done about the attempted attack on the coach?" said Landlord Larry.

"I'll go out so as ter git thar at daybreak, and see if thar can be any trail found.

"It is spittin' now, but not much, and I guess we can find if we done any harm in our fire and maybe track the varmints," said Old Huck.

"And I'll go with you," said Landlord Larry.

"Count me another," the doctor added.

Then it was decided to take a dozen men along, and the doctor and the landlord bade the old driver good-night and departed, when he at once turned in, after throwing a large log upon his fire to burn until morning.

"That is a strange old character, Larry," said Doctor Dick, as the two walked back to the hotel.

"He is indeed, Doc. I do not understand him, for he is a mystery to me."

"And to me; but do you think I should send another courier to Buffalo Bill making known this intended attack?"

"No, write as you did before to him, and we'll get it by way of W——."

"I'll do so; but did you learn anything in particular about this attack?"

"Nothing more than that fully half a dozen road-agents were seen, and but for the bold and prompt act of Old Huck there would have been death and robbery beyond a doubt.

"He is a very daring man to do what he did."

"He is indeed, and it will surely mark him for death with the road-agents."

"Beyond all doubt; but we must make a start early to bring us to the scene by daybreak, so good-night."

The two separated and yet met again when Old Huck came up ready mounted to take the trail.

The party who were to go were soon in the saddle and they started off at a canter.

There was just a trace of snow upon the ground, and they were glad to see that there was no more.

A brisk gallop brought them to the Dead Line at dawn, and the search was at once begun.

Hardly any snow had fallen there, and in the pinons there was none, so that in several places the ground was stained red, showing that the coach had not been useless if not fatal.

Then Old Huck showed his skill a a trailer, for he at once went to work in a way that revealed the fact that he was an old hand at the business.

He went from blood-stain to blood-stain in silence, examined the position of the thicket, took in the whole situation, and the direction of the stage when the firing had been going on, and at last started off up the canyon following a trail that was so faint that a number of the party said that there was no trail at all.

But he climbed up the steep side of the canyon end, followed by the others, and there on the top were found several red spots in different places.

"Three, maybe dead, maybe only wounded," he said shortly.

"Those three stains tell you that, old man?" asked Doctor Dick.

"Yas, they took off ther dead or wounded, as ther case might be, and halted ter rest after climbin' up here, and right here is whar they laid the dead or wounded down, while they was restin'."

"Well, which way now, Huck, for your solution seems the right one," said Doctor Dick.

"That's hard ter tell, for a horse wouldn't leave no track here," was the reply.

That even Old Huckleberry had lost his grip on the trail, after reaching the top of the ridge, was soon evident, for, search as he might, he could find no trace of a track in the hard, rocky soil about them.

"We'll scatter, pards, and try ter find another place whar they rested ther loads, for they won't carry heavy weights far up this slope without restin'," he said.

So the party separated, and half an hour after a halloo from Old Huck brought them together again.

There was another place where the road-agents had halted, for there were the three tell-tale spots of blood lying close together.

Again they separated on a search, but after hours spent in vain, they were forced to give it up, Old Huck remarking:

"Thar is snow higher up, so it's no use, now."

Back to Last Chance the party reluctantly retraced their way, after they had eaten their noonday meal, and all hope of finding a clew to the retreat of the road-agents was given up, save by Old Huckleberry, who each day went off on a hunt, though many were sure that it was a trail, not game, that he was hunting.

When at last the day came for him to start off on his run, he mounted his box without the slightest apparent reluctance, nodded good-by and drove off on his perilous journey.

There was much anxiety felt at Last Chance for his return, and a number talked of riding out to the Dead Line and meeting him, but this was not done, as a suggestion was made that the old man might not take it kindly, but look upon it as an interference, a belief that he was not able to take care of himself.

When, however, the time for his arrival came, and no stage appeared, men looked anxiously at each other and wondered if the old man was another victim of the road-agents' hunt for gold.

When an hour passed and there was no stage in sight, Doctor Dick said that he would mount his horse and go to see what was the matter.

He was not allowed to go alone, for a score of mounted men at once followed him, and the ride was a rapid one to the Dead Line, for the coach was not met on the way.

Arriving at the Dead Line the coach loomed in sight.

It was still, and, dashing up, the horses were found hitched to trees.

But not a soul was visible.

The box was empty, and not a soul was found within.

Where was Old Huck?

That question could not be answered, and a search was at once begun.

Upon the stage-box blood was found.

That looked very bad for Old Huck.

Some one had hitched those horses to the trees surely, but who?

The coach had evidently been searched, for the cushions were thrown out and the boot open, and yet, strange to say, the mail bag had escaped the eyes of the searchers, being found by Landlord Larry where Old Huck always hid it, in one of the cushions arranged for the purpose by the old man.

Who had been killed, or what the coach had been robbed of was not revealed.

The party camped all night upon the scene, and a thorough search was made the next morning again for the missing driver.

Miles back on the trail had the miners ridden, and more, every rock and thicket by the way was thoroughly searched, yet all in vain.

At last the party were reluctantly compelled to give up further search for Old Huck, be he dead or alive, for not the slightest clew could be found and there was no trace of any trail whatever.

Doctor Dick mounted the box and drove the coach back to Last Chance, and the miners had knocked off work and were assembled to hear bad news, which the delay caused them to look for.

Landlord Larry and Doctor Dick at once held a con-

sultation upon their return, and it was decided to send Harding again to Fort Faraway as a courier with a message to Buffalo Bill.

But when called upon to go, to the surprise of both, Harding refused to go.

"You went before, Pard Harding, so why refuse this time, when you know it is our duty to report, as agreed, to Buffalo Bill, the attacks of the road-agents upon the coaches, that he may place the matter before the commandant?" said Doctor Dick, who was anxious to have the mysterious disappearance of Old Huckleberry known.

"I went before, Doctor Dick, but I do not care to go again," was Harding's firm rejoinder.

"Do you fear to go?" asked Landlord Larry, with a smile.

"If you think I am influenced by fear I will prove to the contrary," was the quiet rejoinder.

"By going?"

"No."

"How then?"

"Have you a driver to take the coach out to W—— on its next run, landlord?"

"No, unless Doctor Dick will kindly do so."

"I cannot," was the quick response of the doctor.

"Then I will," said the young miner.

"You?"

"Yes, landlord."

"Do you know how to drive?"

"I have driven six-in-hand often."

"When?"

"I drove wagons and ambulances in the army, and on one occasion drove the general with four-in-hand over four hundred miles of the worst country I ever saw."

"I guess you will do then, and it is far easier to get a courier to go to the fort than it is a driver for the coach."

"You are right."

"Are you in earnest, Harding?" asked the landlord.

"Certainly."

"You know all that you risk?"

"Thoroughly."

"Then I retract my words in asking you if you feared to go to the fort as courier, for your volunteering as driver proves that you fear nothing."

"All right, Pard Larry, let it go at that."

"Well, Harding, consider yourself engaged for the berth of driver, and be ready to take the coach on its next run."

"You will find me on hand."

"And let me tell you that I am authorized to pay three times the regular wages."

"It will come acceptable."

"If you live to get it," was the suggested response of Landlord Larry.

This having been settled upon, greatly to Larry's relief, he further talked with Doctor Dick, and it was de-

cided that as Old Huck had only disappeared, and the coach had not been robbed of the mails, they would send no report of the affair to Buffalo Bill, but wait and see how Harding came out with his drive.

The news soon spread about that Hal Harding had volunteered to drive the coach through to W—— and he at once became a hero in the camps, for those bold fellows always loved heroism in a man above all other qualities.

He was, however, regarded as a dead man beforehand, for that he would be killed seemed a foregone conclusion, and many felt pity for the fate they felt assured would befall the handsome young miner.

But Harding seemed not to dread the drive in the least, but went on about his duties in his usual cheery way.

Sticking to the work in his mine he had found that it panned out richer than he had anticipated, and he already had partnership offers, and a good price if he would sell.

He had kept his eyes open, too, in his secret service work for Buffalo Bill, and had noted down certain discoveries he had made of a suspicious nature, and also had the names of a few whom he considered worth while watching.

At last the day came for the coach to start out, and as nothing had been heard of Old Huck, Hal Harding reported at the hotel ready to mount the box and drive through.

CHAPTER VIII.

TAKING CHANCES.

There was not a shadow of dread at the fate that might be his upon the face of Hal Harding as he mounted to the stage-box and gathered up the reins.

The mails were aboard, and he knew that he had a valuable freight hidden away, as best it could be, of gold dust, being risked by miners who were sending it eastward.

What gold was to be sent out was always kept a secret, known only to the senders, to Landlord Larry and the driver, and though it was taking chances to let it go, the senders were risking it, as gamblers chance money in large sums upon the turn of a card.

Then, too, there was a very strange feature in the holding up of the coaches, and that was the fact that they had never been halted on the outward run, no matter how much gold they carried out, but always when bringing back to Last Chance the exchange in bank notes.

The road-agents knew that they could carry large sums in money where they could not be bothered with gold in bulk.

Not a passenger was to go, and Harding sung out in a cheerful tone:

"All ready."

"Go," cried Larry, and the vehicle rolled away in a manner that showed that the young miner was as good a driver as he had asserted that he was.

The crowd cheered wildly, the voices echoing down the canyon as he drove along, and now and then he would raise his hat to those who greeted him from their cabins and mines as he went along.

Out of the valley he turned, swinging at a brisk trot along through canyons, over hills, up mountains, by the way of the narrow passes and down again to the valleys.

He reached the relay station nearest Last Chance, and made known to the stock-tender the fate of Old Huck.

"You goes next, pard, for it won't be long afore Doctor Dick will come along and tell me that poor Hal Harding has gone under," said the sympathetic stock-tender.

"Think so?"

"Sure of it."

"Why, Doctor Dick?"

"Waal, ef you gets kilt no other man in or out o' Last Chance will have ther grit to drive ther old Death Trap, for thet hearse you is sittin' on is no more."

"It is an unlucky old vehicle I admit, pard; but I'll be going," and Harding drove on once more.

He had not seen a soul at the Dead Line.

All was as quiet at that dread spot as the forms of those who had lost their lives there.

Only the stockmen at the station greeted him on the way, and at night he came to the halting cabin a little ahead of time.

He had the same story to tell at each one of the relay stations, about the fate of Old Huck, and an ominous shake of the head from those who listened convinced him that they expected him to be the next victim.

The next morning he rolled into W—— a few minutes ahead of time, and the stage-agent seemed surprised to see a new man upon the box.

He heard what Harding had to say of Old Huck, listened to his report of his uneventful run and received from him the way bill of what he carried.

"You have done well, Mr. Harding, and I hope we will hear no more of these attacks, so that you may escape, for, if they make a victim of you I do not know who we can look to unless it be that fearless fellow Doctor Dick."

"And his practice, mining interests and gambling

occupy him so thoroughly that he will not drive again, sir, I am sure."

"Not unless no other can be found, for he is just the man to step in then in open defiance of danger."

"Yes, he is just what you say of him, sir."

"Now, how is that poor passenger who was crazed by a shot from the road-agents?"

"Aimlessly wandering about Last Chance, sir, harmless and to be pitied."

"Well, I have received letters asking about him, and had to make a report of the circumstances."

"It will be upon your return trip that you will have to be watchful."

"I will be, sir, never fear," was the cheery response.

Meanwhile, the news of the mysterious disappearance of the old driver, Huckleberry, soon spread about W——, and people gathered about the stage office to have a look at the brave fellow who had, in the face of the past experience, brought the coach through.

The agent had told Harding that if the mails had gone through nothing had been taken, for no freight had been sent and no passengers were along on that trip.

As they had found nothing to take, the road-agents had doubtless visited their vengeance upon Old Huck, especially to repay him for having run the gantlet of them on a former occasion.

There were passengers booked for Last Chance by stage, but when it became known that Old Huck had been killed, as all supposed he must have been, they concluded that they were in no great hurry to reach the mining camps and could wait a while longer.

So Harding discovered that he would have to return with an empty coach, as far as passengers were concerned.

He showed no disappointment, however, at having to return alone, and was told by the agent that he was to carry back considerable money and a valuable mail.

"All right, sir, I'll do my best to go through in safety," he said, and he grasped the outstretched hand of the agent, who said:

"I feel as though I was shaking hands with a man about to die."

"Now I don't feel that way in the least," was the laughing response, and Harding sprung upon the box, seized his reins, cracked his whip when he got the word, and was off.

The crowd gathered there cheered him, of course, but a generally sad expression rested upon every face

as they looked upon the brave young miner who had taken his life in his hand to drive what was now called the Death Trap.

Having halted for the night at the way cabin, Harding pushed on the next morning with the first glimmer of dawn, and reached the third relay at noon.

There was then one more relay and the run into Last Chance, which in good weather could readily be made before sunset.

He passed the last relay, and the "Job's comforter" who resided there in the person of the stock-tender, said, as he was about to start:

"Good-by pard, and do you know I kinder feels as if yer was a dead man already."

"Don't you believe it, for I am worth a dozen dead men, old man," was the laughing response, and Harding drove on, with the Dead Line rising in his mind before him.

He drove more rapidly than was the schedule time, and when he came into the pass, with the Dead Line just ahead, he had half an hour to spare.

The horses pricked up their ears, as though they knew the doomed place well, and the leaders gave a snort as they beheld a form ahead.

It was a man leaning against a tree.

That Harding also saw the form was certain, for his eyes were riveted upon the spot.

As he drew nearer, the man moved away from the tree and advanced down into the trail.

Still Harding made no move to halt, to rush by, or appeared to take notice of him.

The man placed himself by the side of the trail and stood as still as a statue, after making a slight sign, as it appeared.

The answer of Harding to this sign was to shake his head.

On rolled the coach, and when it neared the silent form, without any command to do so, Harding drew hard upon the reins, pressed his foot upon the brake and brought the coach to a standstill, the horses, which had before drawn it through the deadly dangers it had passed at that spot, showing a restless dread and expectancy of the cracking of revolvers.

But there was no weapon drawn either by the man on the side of the trail, or by Harding, and neither seemed to dread the other.

The reason for this was that the one who had awaited the coming of the coach at the Dead Line was none other than Old Huckleberry.

CHAPTER IX.

A SECRET KEPT.

Just fifteen minutes before the time of arrival set for the coach by schedule Hal Harding drove up to the hotel at Last Chance.

From his entering the valley and passing the first mine, he had been followed by cheer after cheer, until when he reached the shanty, known as Landlord Larry's tavern, there were many there to swell the chorus of welcome.

Larry greeted him most warmly, and when he saw what a valuable freight he had brought through with him, he told him that he was deserving of the highest praise.

Had Harding taken one-half the drinks offered him he would have soon become paralyzed.

But he was not a drinking man, received the honors heaped upon him in a modest manner, and when asked by Landlord Larry if he had seen any road-agents, answered:

"Not one."

"All quiet along the trail then?"

"As quiet as the grave."

"I suppose you were anxious upon reaching the Dead Line?"

"I think the horses were more nervous than I was, for they at least showed it."

"You told the agent at W—— about Old Huck's fate?"

"Of course, sir, I told him of his mysterious disappearance."

"Do you know I half-way hoped you would hear something of Old Huck at W——?"

"No, I heard nothing of him there."

"And none of the stock-tenders had seen him?"

"They did not speak to me of having done so."

"Well, he is gone, that is certain; but you have begun well, Harding, and I hope may keep it up."

"Thank you, Landlord Larry, I hope that I will, for I have abiding faith in the belief that I will live to be an old man."

"I hope so sincerely," said the doctor, who had been an attentive listener to the conversation between the young miner and Larry.

"They say at W——, Doctor Dick, that if I go under, you will be the only man who will dare drive the coach through."

"And I will not do it, unless we are doomed to be cut off from all communication, and I see that Last

Chance will be ruined, from fear of traveling the trail to it," said Doctor Dick, decidedly.

"How is your patient, doctor?"

"Which one, for I have a number of patients just now."

"The young man whose wound at the hands of the road-agents turned his brain."

"I see him daily, and he is about the same, like a child of four, mentally."

"They asked about him at W——, for the agent had received several letters regarding him."

"Ah!" said Doctor Dick, with interest.

"What was their tenor?"

"That he had come out West upon a special mission, and with considerable money, and since leaving W——, where he had written of his arrival, not a word had been heard from him."

"I am glad that he has friends, then, for he will be cared for in his misfortune."

"Yes," Doctor Dick, and the agent hinted that some one was coming out to look him up."

"I rejoice at this, for he needs care," the doctor rejoined, and he added:

"I have been convinced that he was no ordinary individual, and had been well reared; but what a blow it will be to his friends to find him as he is, poor fellow."

After some further conversation Harding went to his cabin for the night; but he was not long in discovering that he was regarded as a hero by all.

He had not made the slightest reference to having met Old Huckleberry at the Dead Line and as he thought over the fact that he had done so, and the secret that was known to him alone.

He reported for duty promptly when the time came around for him to take the coach again on its perilous run.

"We have got considerable gold-dust aboard, pard, and a big out-going mail, so I hope you will go through all right," said Landlord Larry, while Doctor Dick, who just then came up, said:

"Yes, Harding, I have several valuable letters in the mail, with drafts for large sums, which I sincerely hope will not miscarry."

"I'll do the best I can, Doctor Dick," was the answer, and Harding went out and mounted the box.

He could not but feel gratified at the size of the crowd that had gathered to see him depart, and he raised his sombrero politely in response to the cheers.

He had gone through in safety once; but could he do it a second time?

That was the thought in the brain of every man there assembled.

At last the word was given and away went the coach, cheered all the way down the valley until it was out of sight.

As before the young driver lost no time on the trail, but upon reaching the Dead Line, instead of seeming to dread the spot and wishing to drive rapidly by, he dismounted from the box, and, going to the tree where he had met Old Huckleberry, felt about among the wild flowers growing about it until he picked up a slip of paper, while he hastily read what he found written thereon.

Taking from his pocket a similar slip, upon which there was writing, he thrust it out of sight in the spot he had taken the other from.

Then he returned to the coach and drove on once more as though he felt no fear of his surroundings.

He reached the night cabin on time, and surprised the stock-tender there by telling him that he intended to drive on to W—— that night.

"You don't mean it?"

"I certainly do."

"Why yer'll kill yer team, smash ther old box and crush yerself to atoms."

"I believe I can drive the road at night," was the firm response.

"It's the wu'st piece of road on ther whole Overland Trail."

"It is a bad one, but I will depend upon my team mainly and risk it."

"Why do you do it?"

"I have an idea that it will be safer."

"How so?"

"Well, if there were road-agents on the trail to hold me up to-morrow I will miss them, that is all."

"Right you are, pard; but I don't believe they is as dangerous as traveling this trail to-night."

"I'll let you know what I think upon my return," was Harding's answer, and he drove on once more.

Night had come on and he well knew the dangers before him from a mistake in driving.

He had been over the road perhaps half-a-dozen times, always riding upon the box, but upon his last run as driver he had most carefully noted every foot of the way.

The night was dark, but he knew that he had the instinct of his team to depend upon and that was more than half the battle.

He was determined to push through and save his load of gold, and if he did make a successful run over that part of the trail by night, he would do what no other driver had done, and on this account his pride was at stake.

So he started boldly yet cautiously upon his way, and when the sun was just rising in W—— the stage-agent there was awakened by wheels dashing up to his door and heard the call:

"The coach from Last Chance has arrived."

He was up in a hurry and congratulating the young driver upon his night drive, while he said:

"Do you know I feared you would be held up to-day, for a party of desperadoes lately left W——, and I felt most anxious about you."

"Yes, they are on the trail waiting for me now, not knowing that I slipped by in the night."

"I'll get together a band of brave fellows and go back after them," and an hour after Harding was mounted upon a fine horse and leading a dozen men back upon the trail he had safely driven over in the night.

CHAPTER X.

A MYSTERIOUS SOUND.

The stage-agent at W—— was right in declaring that the coach might be held up on the rough trail that was always driven by daylight, for the party he feared were half-a-dozen wild fellows who had ridden into the settlement two days before and stated that they were on their way to the mines.

They were well mounted and armed, had several pack horses with them, and, though not having the excuse of drinking to make them dreaded, had carried on in a way that caused all peaceably disposed persons to dread them.

Who they were no one knew, and when they left the place honest men breathed more freely and congratulated each other that no tragedy had occurred, as a reminder of their visit.

They had gone out upon the trail to Last Chance late in the afternoon, and the agent felt sure that they would camp early and meet the coach the next morning, and the result he greatly feared, after a look at the party in question, so he was rejoiced to find that

Harding had taken the great risk of driving through by night.

The crowd that he dreaded were five in number, and they were young men, bronzed-faced, brawny and with an air of recklessness stamped upon them.

That they were a dangerous lot their appearance indicated, and few men would care to face them where no help was at hand.

They had halted some dozen miles from W——, and gone into camp on a brook a few hundred yards from the trail the stage would follow.

That they knew their way well their movements were proof of, for they rode at once to the camping-place, staked out their horses, spread their blankets and gathered wood to cook their supper with.

The spot chosen was one where they could command a view of the trail for a mile in both directions, yet remain in concealment themselves.

They had supper, then gambled a while by the light of the fire and afterward turned in, setting no watch.

It was about midnight when one of the party awoke, half arose and listened.

He heard a rumbling sound that seemed to surprise him.

"I say, pards," he called out.

A man awoke and asked drowsily:

"What is it, Sully?"

"I hear wheels."

"Nonsense."

"But I do."

"It's the roar of the stream."

"I don't think so."

"I does."

Others were awakened and listened, and they distinctly heard a low, rumbling sound.

But after some minutes the sound died away and the one who had first discovered it asked:

"Do you think it could have been the coach?"

"No, indeed."

"Why not?"

"No man living would dare drive a coach over this trail at night."

"It sounded to me like wheels."

"There it is again."

All listened attentively, and then one said:

"It is the wind in the pines."

The wind was rising and this solution of the mysterious sound seemed to settle the matter, so all laid down in their blankets once more.

The man who had discovered the sound was the one to arise first in the morning, and the day was just dawning when he left his blankets, gazed about him and walked over to where the stage trail ran, several hundred yards from their camp, and along through a bit of meadow land.

He had hardly reached the trail when he gave a loud halloo.

The voice brought his comrades from their blankets in an instant, and his call set them coming toward him at a run.

"Look there, pards!" he cried, and as each man reached his side he stood gazing down at the trail.

"The stage has gone by," said one, with an oath, as his eyes fell upon the tracks of the six horses and the wheelmarks, lately made.

"Then one man was bold enough to dare the drive at night!"

"Sure, and the chief will be furious with us!"

"What is to be done now?"

"The coach is safe in W—— now, for if that fellow drove safely over the back trail he had no trouble beyond here."

"Then we had better get a move on us."

"Sure, for that agent suspects us, and there'll be a gang on our heels mighty quick," and hastening back to camp the party mounted and rode rapidly on toward the mountains.

The direction taken by the outlaws indicated that they were headed for that mysterious region—the Grand Canyon of the Colorado—where so few white men had penetrated up to that day.

They started in a hurry, pressing forward at full speed, and did not notice a tall figure crouching behind a clump of bushes and watching them intently. As the outlaws sped out of sight the figure rose to its feet and stood erect.

It was none other than Old Huckleberry, the man who had been driving the coach through and who was thought to have been killed by the outlaws.

Going into a clump of trees he led forth a horse which had been muzzled to keep it from neighing.

Mounting it, he turned into the road and listened attentively for a few moments.

Then came faintly upon the breeze the sound of the distant hoof beats of galloping horses.

This was a party from W——, headed by Harding. It was the party of Vigilantes, led by Landlord

Larry and Harding, from Last Chance, to follow the trail of the outlaws.

Presently they hove in sight, and there was a shout of surprise from them at the sight of the man whom all of them, except Harding, had thought dead.

Old Huckleberry, however, gave them little time to think.

"This way," he cried, indicating the direction in which the outlaws had gone, and speaking in a voice which seemed strangely familiar to some of his hearers. "The trail is still hot."

He wheeled his horse as he spoke and at a mad gallop led the way over the rough trail the outlaws had taken.

It was a rough trail that the outlaws had taken, and it led into a country that grew wilder and wilder as they approached the vicinity of the Grand Canyon.

The trail was the same as that taken by Buffalo Bill the day on which he witnessed the landslide which had buried under it the mining cabin of Wallace Weston, the hermit of the Colorado Canyon, and as they neared the brink of the mighty chasm they were forced to pull their horses to a walk and proceed slowly and carefully down the winding trail.

Old Huckleberry was in the lead.

He seemed to be thoroughly familiar with the ground and had naturally, it seemed, fallen into the command of the party of Vigilantes, none of whom seemed at all disposed to dispute his leadership.

Suddenly, Old Huckleberry pulled his horse to a standstill and sat motionless for a moment, listening.

The remainder of the party did the same. From down the chasm then came the unmistakable sounds of firing. Every one heard it and every one pressed forward at a quicker pace.

Within half an hour the party came within sight of the outlaws. Two of their number lay dead in the trail, each shot through the head, and the remainder were scattered among the rocks on the hill in front, as if searching for an invisible assailant.

Then came a rattling volley from the Vigilantes, a scattering return from the outlaws, a quick succession of flashes from the two revolvers of Old Huckleberry, and the battle was over. Every one of the outlaw band of ten lay dead, while several of the Vigilantes were wounded, but none seriously.

"Now, gentlemen," said Old Huckleberry, when the smoke had cleared away, "I will make my true identity known to you."

He removed a wig of whitish gray hair that covered his head as he spoke, showing that his own hair, which was black and long, had been coiled up beneath it.

Then he removed the pair of spectacles from his nose and looked around at his companions.

"Buffalo Bill!" came the cry from every one.

It was indeed Buffalo Bill. He had worked in disguise in order to prevent the outlaws from getting wind of the fact that he was in the vicinity, and for this reason take extra precautions against him. When the coach he drove was attacked he had first driven off the robbers and then, leaving the coach to go home by itself, had taken their trail, securing possession of the horse of an outlaw he had shot, and which had been left behind them in their flight.

Several hiding-places filled with gold, bank-notes and valuables, stolen by the robbers, were found in the vicinity, and all that day the Vigilantes spent trailing about the canyon, trying to find the whereabouts of the assailants of the outlaws who had killed two of their number before they came upon them.

They failed to do this.

The man who had attacked the robbers in their flight, killing two of them and thus enabling the Vigilantes to come up with them, was none other than Wallace Weston, the Hermit of the Colorado Canyon. He had decided to leave the West for good with the gold he had obtained, and was just leaving the canyon when he learned that the robbers had made their retreat there. He had spied upon their motions, and after attacking them in their flight had watched, from a secret hiding place, their slaughter at the hands of the Vigilantes.

His knowledge of the canyon had enabled him to elude the searchers, and that night he joined his friend Lucas Langley at a secret retreat, and the two decided to start for the East within a short time.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 70, will contain "Buffalo Bill's Secret Camp; or, Trailing the Cloven Hoofs." If you are interested in the further adventures of the young man who was rendered insane by the wound he received from the outlaws, you should read next week's issue. How he was kidnapped, how rescued and how Doctor Dick, the Gold King Gambler, met his death, will be told in the rattling story in next week's issue.



Prize-winners in this contest to be announced in two weeks.

Judges hard at work. It's a pretty ticklish thing to decide upon, all of the entries are so good.

In the meantime we will print a number of the best stories received recently.

While you are awaiting the result of this contest, get to work on the new contest. Don't lose any time.

It's a corker, as you can see from page 31.

My Narrowest Escape.

(By Thomas Kline, Massachusetts.)

This escape is about the nearest I ever came to losing my life. It was on a cold winter's day, when some other fellows and myself took our sleds and went for an hour's coasting.

The street that we used to coast on was in Charlestown, where I lived at that time. I don't remember the name of the street, but that don't count. It was a short street, but very steep, and as smooth as glass.

I was about twelve years old at the time this happened to me.

The first boy that coasted down was to remain at the foot of the street and watch out for teams until the next fellow came down, when he was to take his place, and so on. I had coasted down about a dozen times when my turn came again. I called to the watcher that was at the foot of the street, to see if there was any team in sight. He called out something which I took to be "No! come on," but which I found out afterward was "Yes, stay back." You can bet your life that I was sorry I misunderstood him.

Well, to go on with "my narrowest escape." I took a run and threw myself on my sled. The sled flew over the ice like a flash of lightning. Before I reached the end of the street I was wishing it went as slow as a snail. The boys at the end of the street were yelling themselves hoarse for me to stop.

I knew that I couldn't stop, and I was too frightened to fall off. No wonder I was frightened, as I knew what their yelling meant.

Faster and faster the sled went, and as I came to a point about six yards from the corner at the end of the street, along came a coal cart, drawn by two horses, with two tons of coal in it. When I saw it I lost my nerve entirely, and who wouldn't? I can't tell if my hair stood on end, but I guess it did. I knew if I didn't steer the sled I would go between the wheels, and either have the

life crushed out of me or have my legs cut off. But I couldn't stop the sled. The driver didn't see me or he would have done something.

The sled drew nearer to the team. When I was about two or three feet from the team my nerve seemed to come back to me, and I threw out my foot and turned the sled around. I didn't escape without an injury, though.

The sled slid alone sideways and crashed into the hind wheel, hurting my hip badly. My hip was sore and black and blue for a week afterward.

This may not be as thrilling as some, but it was exciting enough for me, and is true.

Blown Out to Sea.

(By Halleck Holme.)

Last summer I spent a few weeks of my vacation cruising with my brother on Narragansett Bay, in his catboat, the *Spray*.

We had been on our cruise just two days, and night found us in Newport harbor. The next morning was very dark and stormy. We lay at anchor until five o'clock in the evening, and then making sail we headed for the sea, intending to take a sittle spin, and then return to the harbor.

We were gone about an hour when the wind suddenly began to freshen, and fifteen minutes later it was blowing half a gale. The sea also began to grow rough, and a large bank of black clouds were piled around the horizon in the west. A sudden hard puff of wind now struck us, breaking one of the halyards. It was now out of the question to try to sail out the coming storm, so we threw the anchor over to serve as a drag, for we were drifting out to sea at race-horse speed.

As night closed in on us, the scene was a wild and grand one. The waves were rolling fearfully high, and one could see them come rolling down to us with their heads a hissing mass of broken white foam, and their

bodies arched in glistening coils like those of a great, green serpent.

Our boat was laboring heavily, and shipping large quantities of spray and water. Once or twice I thought she would be swamped.

But this tremendous pounding soon started a leak, and we were obliged to bail and pump to keep the water out.

While we were thus engaged, I chanced to look up, and there, bearing down upon us, as if shot out of the darkness, was a huge schooner. Through the foam and spray she loomed up a gigantic shape. In an instant my eyes took in her complete form. I saw her green sidelight, the straining headsails, and all her other close-reefed sails. But what gave me most joy was that I knew that she would go clear of us. As she pitched up and over the waves, her heavy bows would come down with a crash and hammer the water into a mass of foam that swirled along the lee rail and leaped and tumbled in great, snowy heaps as it encountered the rigging and other obstacles. The roaring of the wind as it escaped from under the foot of the heavy sails was like the rumblings of an express train. Not a man was to be seen.

I tried to make out the man at the wheel, but the spray was too thick for my eye to pierce. Before we had half realized her presence she was gone.

Before morning the sea and wind went down, and we found it possible to sail the yacht back to the harbor. It was an experience never to be forgotten, and one I would not like to go through again.

A Hay Ride.

(By Fred Wright, New York.)

One day last summer I was on a hay wagon out in the field, and one of the men asked me to drive while they packed the hay. There was something like a ladder in the front of the wagon. Well, I stood the ladder up and stood on the next to the top rung.

The two horses I was driving were very restless, one of which was a gray mare; she was especially restless.

The wagon was almost filled with hay when the ladder that I was standing on broke. I fell right on top of the gray mare. She took fright and both horses dashed off to the end of the field.

One of the other men saw them and stopped them. When I got off I was pretty well shaken up.

"Dutch's" Runaway.

(By John McKenzie, Mass.)

Recently I went up country for a month's vacation, and one day strolled over to "Dutch" Whitney's house to see him. He suggested that we go out for a drive, so I consented, and he hitched up the bay in the carriage. "Dutch" was a big, strong, good-natured fellow, and although the horse was nervous and very large, I felt safe under the boy's care.

We were discussing horses when something—we never knew what—caused Nell to shy and then let out a snort, and laying back her ears, start down the road like a flying dragon with Whitney trying to "saw" her to a slack, but the bay caught the bit in her teeth and this was of no avail.

"'M 'fraid she's gittin' away, Jack."

I never heard "Dutch" say anything so dead earnest before. His face was like a sheet, and the bulging veins in his neck told the amount of strength the boy was exerting to check the bay's speed. The carriage careened and slewed, but did not go over. The bridge was in sight and my blood ran cold as I realized I couldn't swim. I clutched the reins with "Whit," but I only weigh a little over a hundred pounds, so my help didn't count much. At the very beginning of the bridge the vehicle slewed and must strike the rail. I waited to be dashed into eternity, but we struck a stone, went up on two wheels, but escaped the fence. Across the loosely-floored bridge we thundered, Nell seeming to endeavor to slide from under the harness. At last we were over and at the foot of a long hill.

Ah! Nell, the vixen, was conquered at last, for with both of us straining at the reins, she slowed down and balked at the spring halfway up. We came home by another road and "Dutch" laughed—actually laughed.

My Adventure.

(By Frank Ward, Ohio.)

One day last summer my dog, Major, and I went out for a hunt. We were staying at my aunt's house in Nebraska. I had splendid luck, and shot two coyotes. We were returning when I and my dog had become separated. It was dusk and getting dark fast, so I walked fast. I was going up a hill when down bounded a large animal.

I was trembling and raised my rifle and took aim at the wolf.

I fired, and then down the hill came my dog. He was bleeding a little, as the ball had grazed his side. I saw that I had hurt him and then began to cry. We got home and in a couple of days my dog was all right. I was glad my aim was not straight.

An Excursion.

(By Fred Figary, N. Y.)

I went up to Silvan Beach one day last summer to see the place. Soon after I got there I thought I would go across the lake on the steamer. When we got a little way from the shore the steamer ran on a sandbank and was stuck.

The engine would not work. I thought we would all be drowned. I was so frightened that I fell into the lake, but was helped out all right, and the rest of the day went very pleasantly.

Persimmon Hunting.

(By Clifton Browning, Texas.)

One Saturday I and some friends of mine were to go persimmon hunting. They couldn't go, so I went by myself. The trees were about a mile from home. I went out there and got a basketful of persimmons without any mishap. On the way back I had to cross a railroad. Just as I got within about five yards of the track a cow came tearing after me. There was a steep embankment

on the other side, so I had to run along beside the track to the crossing. Just as I got to the crossing a train was coming along the track.

It was about four yards from me. I thought I could get across before the train got to me.

I tried to run across, but my foot got stuck.

When the train was about a yard from me the cow hooked me. She caught me in the back of the coat and tossed me out of the way. But she got run over herself.

Saved by a Dinner Pail.

(By C. D. Southard, Mo.)

This incident of which I am about to write, occurred late last fall. I was coming home from school. It had been sprinkling rain all day, and the ground was wet and slippery. I was walking up the railroad, and a freight train overtook me, so I thought I would get on and ride home. As all the rest of the boys and myself were used to riding every train that came through our little town and stopped, I thought I could get on this one. But just as I went to grab the handles both my feet slipped out from under me.

I barely got the tips of the fingers of my left hand upon the handle. I clung there as long as I could, but soon lost my grip and fell under the cars. I had my dinner pail on my arm, and as I fell across the rail the wheel struck my pail and the pail slid on the rail and pushed me from under the wheel.

Thanks to the old dinner pail, for it surely saved my life. I have it still and intend to keep it.

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